

sweatshop and unfair competitive conditions? I know of one contract for mackinaw coats which was let to clothing manufacturers in two different provinces and which netted, exclusive of overhead, less than thirty-eight cents for labour. The same applies to the clothing contracts being let by the Department of National Defence for trousers, caps and so on, for use in the unemployment camps. The dominion government—I am not particularly interested whether it is this government or some other government—are letting contracts which have been obtained under the most unfair competitive methods known to the trade.

While I realize that it is not within his jurisdiction may I ask the minister whether he will investigate the conditions that exist to-day under which the rural mail service is carried on, from the local post office to the boxholder. Whatever may have been the state of affairs yesterday, the fact is that conditions to-day are scandalous, and before this or any other government can expect the business men or the manufacturers of the country, either by legislation or otherwise, to improve their methods in relation to labour, it must clean its own house.

Mr. CASGRAIN: I think we should have some further explanation from the minister. He was not in this house during the last days of the last session of the last parliament, but I can well recall that in 1930 hon. gentlemen now occupying the treasury benches were on this side of the house, and for four or five days in one session they took part in a protracted debate in favour of the poor mail carrier and rural mail contractor. They pleaded for the poor man in the country who was getting only a few cents for each trip. The present Minister of Justice (Mr. Guthrie) and the present Minister of Public Works (Mr. Stewart) were quite eager then to have the Post Office Department and the government of that day given an undertaking that adequate remuneration should be given these employees of the government. Now this government has been functioning for five years and apparently the only answer we can get from the minister when we point out the condition that prevails is the statement that contracts are given to the lowest tenderer. This government has inaugurated, we have been told, a new order of things since the new year, and we hear great talk about reform and new deals all along the line. We have been told time and again that things will be changed throughout the country so that no one will be allowed to suffer. Well, I want to bring this government face to face

with the present situation and to remind my hon. friends opposite of the attitude they took five years ago, when they were all in favour of helping the rural mail contractors and everyone else who did any work for the government. My hon. friends at that time advocated a better standard of living for everyone and urged that these employees in particular should be enabled to earn more money. To-day they face an election with the same situation existing and nothing has been done. They promised that if they were returned to power they would look after the mail contractor; they would see that justice was done. Why have they not done anything during the five years they have been in power? I am surprised that the minister has nothing better to offer than the statement that contracts are given to the lowest tenderer. If the condition that existed five years ago was unsatisfactory then why has not the government altered it, with all its talk about reform and new deals? I leave it to the country to judge.

Mr. GUTHRIE: When I moved in this house in the year 1929, I think—

An hon. MEMBER: 1930.

Mr. GUTHRIE: —1930, that there should be a change in the remuneration paid under the contract system—and if I remember rightly it was that the rural mail carriers should be taken from the contract basis and put on the mileage basis—had that motion carried it would have been done. But my hon. friend from Charlevoix-Saguenay and those around him voted it down; they beat us.

Mr. CASGRAIN: Why did you not do it?

Mr. GUTHRIE: They beat us on that vote. My motion was made at a time when the treasury was full of money—

Mr. CASGRAIN: That is a great answer.

Mr. GUTHRIE:—but now we have struck a depression and hard times, and our policy is to establish the mileage system as soon as financial affairs throughout the country will permit. But my hon. friend from Charlevoix-Saguenay voted down the proposal and so did all the members of the Liberal party then in the house. They said, no, they would not allow it.

Mr. CASGRAIN: Possibly the motion was voted down under the circumstances.

Mr. GUTHRIE: There was a division on it.