

Unemployment

continuing failure of the government to act, it volunteered to call such a group together. I am sure the council must have been harking back to the experience of 1939, when it was responsible for calling together a similar committee. We have the promise of a dominion-provincial conference scheduled to meet at the end of April. Maybe that conference will be able to deal with this problem, but I doubt whether it can deal with the finer aspects of the continuing challenge of the unemployed employable, particularly as it involves the municipalities.

I strongly suggest that something should be done to implement the recommendation of 1939 and that the conference should be reconvened, so that this forgotten group of unemployed, the greatest of our contemporary social tragedies, will not have to continue to live a hand to mouth existence depending on what they can pick up through the good graces of the voluntary welfare organizations.

Mr. R. R. Knight (Saskatoon): Mr. Speaker, may I say first of all I am against unemployment, but not just because it may appear to be government policy. I do not think it is too fantastic to use that expression. The government has already admitted that there is unemployment on a vast scale. Through the mouths of some of its speakers at least it has admitted responsibility for that condition, yet up to the present it has shown no intention of doing anything about it. It is like the weather. We talk about it but we do not do anything about it, and the government apparently has adopted the same policy and is prepared to sit out the storm.

I have listened to the apologists for the government's lack of action. I listened tonight to the hon. member for Parkdale (Mr. Hunter) who treated the matter as a constitutional problem. That may be of great interest to some hon. members in the house but is somewhat cold comfort, I imagine, to the people who have lost their jobs and who have no steady income. My hon. friend said we have unemployment insurance. Government supporters always fall back upon that consolation. Let us give credit where it is due for unemployment insurance, but I suggest that unemployment insurance in the mind of any honourable man who wants to work and make his contribution to his own family and to the good of the country is no substitute for steady work.

Some mention has been made tonight of the Bennett regime. I think it was brought up by the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale) whom I might classify as another apologist but for a different party. The other day the hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) mentioned it when

he was being taunted from across the other side of the house. He said, "Well, at least it did something". Yes, it did something. I have no particular purpose in raising the matter here tonight, because I feel we should let bygones be bygones and I do not think we should hark back continually to the failures of other regimes. We are more interested in the failure of this one.

My hon. friend mentioned relief camps. I am merely going to use that as an example and a warning to this present government, because if there is any reason that today there is only one representative of the Conservative party in this house from Saskatchewan; if there is any reason that today in my province of Saskatchewan there is only one Conservative member of the legislature—and I believe he is the one who we are told has been flirting with the leadership of the Social Credit party—

Mr. Rowe: They were just trying to flirt with him, he was not flirting with them.

Mr. Knight: I would remind my hon. friend that one of the last members of the Conservative party who was elected to the legislature of Saskatchewan is now the Liberal leader in that province. I am going to say this just as a warning to my hon. friends, not to my right but those across the aisle, that this question of unemployment may be the rock upon which the ship of state of the Liberal party may founder.

If I were an outsider, if I were someone from Asia for instance, I would think it was a strange anomaly that there should be unemployment in Canada. These people look upon our country as wealthy. They look upon our vast acres of timber and wheat growing land; they look at what is a comparatively small population, and they say, "How is it that country can afford not to have its people working?" I do not want to go into our own particular C.C.F. economic philosophy tonight, but I am going to suggest this. I am quite convinced that if tomorrow by some miracle we had twice the population in Canada that we have tonight, we would have exactly the same proportion of unemployed. So long as we operate in the economic phantasmagoria in which we are operating today, we shall have that same proportion of unemployment.

I said it is an anomaly that we should have unemployment at all. We have been told that we have been having a business boom. We have been told our productivity is increasing. We have been told we have limitless natural resources, some of which have been exploited but most of which are as yet undeveloped. How can we have unemployment?