

Proposed Committee on Unemployment

general economic planning required to take up the slack in Canadian industrial and business activities. This can be done by a combination of altered fiscal policies, expansion of our aid to underdeveloped countries through the Colombo plan and United Nations agencies, and through direct government intervention to stimulate industrial development and raise the standards of living of the Canadian people.

My hon. friends to my right will say right away "economic planning". They will say those are terrible words. You should not be afraid of that. What you are afraid of is what someone has told you. That is what they are doing in the United States. This business of surveying the country and deciding that when unemployment reaches a certain figure in a region they are going to do something about it, are going to put in an industry there, are going to allocate contracts, is economic planning. Nothing is being done about it here. We did it during the last war, and that is what I mean; that is what we mean by economic planning. The minister has told us that in other fields they are doing something. There is no doubt that family allowances, unemployment insurance, veterans' pensions and all these other things are a stimulus to the economy and create purchasing power. The situation would be much worse today if we did not have them, but they do not take the place of employment.

My second recommendation is that we should take specific action to cope with the problem of seasonal unemployment. This must be joint action between government and industry to ensure that production schedules are so staggered throughout the year and that off-season work is so planned that the seasonal fluctuation in unemployment is reduced to the barest minimum. This was done successfully during wartime and there is no reason why it cannot be done again.

The minister has stated that this is the biggest drain on unemployment insurance. The former deputy minister of labour, Mr. Arthur MacNamara, who retired after many years of valuable service, said when speaking at Montreal a month or two ago that he did not think all was being done that could be done in the matter of seasonal unemployment. But there again the government cannot do anything about it unless they have the co-operation of those who control the economy of the country. The Minister of Labour and his staff cannot do anything. They are hard-working; they know what should be done, but they cannot do very much about it unless the employer will sit down with them and plan his operations so that seasonal unemployment can be overcome in the area in

[Mr. Gillis.]

which he operates. Nobody else can do anything about it under present circumstances, unless the full co-operation of the employer is secured.

My third recommendation is that there should be special assistance to relieve the hardship and suffering of families hit by what the government calls regional unemployment. A special commission for exploring the possibility of establishing additional or alternative industries in the areas concerned must be appointed. If such measures give no hope of fully meeting the unemployment problems in a given community, ways and means must be provided to assist the people in the area concerned.

I think we are going through a new industrial revolution so far as the coal mines and steel are concerned. It is technological unemployment, and it is permanent. It is here to stay. Something has to be done to meet that technological upset in different parts of Canada, in the regions that are badly affected. The maritimes are affected by both coal and steel. More than 3,000 men have gone out of the coal industry in the last six or eight months. Some 1,600 went out of the steel plant because of modernization within the past couple of months. That region has been badly upset. The government should make a special study there because power is necessary to overcome the difficulties of that centre.

An expert is being sent in to look into thermal power. That is a long-range program. I was in hopes that the minister or the Acting Prime Minister, who is an engineer and very farsighted, might set up a little pilot plant on atomic energy in that region. That is the logical place to do the first experiment in Canada. I notice that in Ontario they are going to put in a pilot plant, no doubt with the co-operation of Chalk River. That is being done in a province that is spending hundreds of millions of dollars for hydroelectric power. Why not put a little pilot plant in the maritimes where the lack of power is our greatest difficulty? I suggest that the Acting Prime Minister do some thinking about it.

My fourth proposal would be that sharp increases be made in the benefit rates for unemployment insurance. The present amounts are pitifully inadequate. That is borne out by a lot of evidence. That fund has reached almost a billion dollars today. The rates are low. It is not hard to understand the feeling of a person who is making \$60, \$70 or \$80 a week, who suddenly finds himself unemployed and having to get along on \$24 a week. In some parts of this province \$24 a week would just about pay the rent, and would leave nothing for food, fuel