

Unemployment Insurance

agree to that, but we all agree that we have had these periods of unemployment throughout the years. This suggestion that we are putting forward is that some method should be adopted so that we would distribute somewhat the hardships and the risks of unemployment, so that the poor, labouring people would not have to bear the whole deadweight of the load.

The workers themselves do not at the present time earn enough to provide for themselves reserves. I have not time to demonstrate that, but it was amply shown in the evidence brought forward before our committee on industrial and international relations when this question was investigated.

Mr. LAVERGNE: They made a lot of money during the war.

Mr. WOODSWORTH: Well, a great many others made a great deal more, and to-day it takes almost half the entire revenues of this country to pay the interest on the war bonds, some of them tax-free, which some people were fortunate or unfortunate enough to secure.

I would also point out that the working men are not to blame for these periods of depression. They cannot be expected to find employment for themselves when the whole machinery of the state is unable to do it. I take it that, primarily, industry itself must bear the responsibility for unemployment. It may be that the state as a state should make some contribution. In some countries it has perhaps contributed too much. It may be well that the labour people should contribute something, but about the only good reason for their contributing is that they might have some definite share in the administration. Aside from that, I cannot see any good reason why they should contribute. They are not responsible for depressions. It is industry, the whole chaotic system of to-day, this cut-throat system of competition that leads inevitably to periods of depression, and as long as this economic order exists the individual workman will be periodically thrown out on the streets. It seems to me that we as a state should step in at least to a limited degree to iron out some of the inequalities.

Mr. MACDOUGALL: What does the hon. member propose as a substitute?

Mr. WOODSWORTH: I do not want at the moment to offer any substitute. I have already said that we have the dole to-day. I have in my hand a copy of the Canadian Forum, which has just come to hand, and which contains an article on the case for

[Mr. Woodsworth.]

unemployment insurance by Harry M. Cassidy. He points out that from a careful study of the figures of the Bureau of Statistics it is estimated that probably between 350,000 and 450,000 people are unemployed in Canada at the present time. The extract from the Canadian Forum continues as follows:

If these estimates are reasonably correct it follows that at no time since December of 1929 have less than 10 per cent of Canada's 2,500,000 wage-earners been out of jobs and that during the present winter the percentage has risen to 20 or more. Last winter the percentage of unemployment was actually higher in Canada than in Great Britain and it is probably about as high this winter, although it was considerably lower during the past summer and autumn.

Then, farther on I find the following:

For the last ten years our annual average of unemployment from all causes, seasonal, business depression, technological change, market friction, et cetera, has probably been from six to eight per cent of our total working force. In a word, we have had the equivalent of any army of 150,000 workers, a greater number than the Canadian corps ever mustered in France during the war, standing idle during the whole of the post-war decade.

I do not think I need add more to what has been said. It seems to me that my colleague has made an admirable and reasoned statement of the case. We have put our position clearly before the government. I am still hoping that there may be a change of mind and attitude on the part of the government and that they will really face the situation and bring forward definite legislation at an early date.

Right Hon. W. L. MACKENZIE KING (Leader of the Opposition): The resolution before the house reads as follows:

That in the opinion of this house, the government should take into consideration the immediate establishment of a federal system of insurance against unemployment, sickness and invalidity.

It will be observed that the resolution deals primarily with the question of unemployment. True, in previous years in this house similar resolutions have been discussed, but I doubt if ever a resolution came before the house in reference to an existing condition where its applicability was as apparent as in the present instance. The government of the day has recognized a national obligation in the matter of unemployment. When at the last session of parliament we were asked to vote \$20,000,000 for unemployment relief we were sanctioning a course of procedure through which the federal parliament recognized its obligation in the matter of unemployment relief. Yesterday I read a statement alleged to have been made by the Minister of Labour