

Proposed Committee on Unemployment

chief form of public investment is public works. I think it should be pointed out that public works, as an effective anti-unemployment measure, is a mixed blessing. I say this because of the diminishing amount of manpower being used in all public works projects. It is not sufficient simply to approve of public works without at the same time knowing the manpower content of any public work under consideration.

May I give an example. The great engineering project now under way in Nova Scotia, the construction of the Canso causeway, while costing approximately \$21 million, is making no substantial contribution to the unemployment problem in that area because of the low ratio of labour to capital equipment. At present about 150 to 200 persons are employed there.

So in considering the impact of public works as an anti-unemployment measure, one must take into account the only important aspect of it for that purpose, namely the volume of manpower required in any particular situation. Furthermore the completion of the Canso causeway will have a very detrimental effect on three communities of the area because of the displacement of personnel.

This example of the Canso causeway is a very apt one for my purposes because, first of all, it allows me to make my point about public works, namely the relationship between labour content and capital equipment. At the same time it provides me an opportunity to draw to the attention of this house the unemployment problem which will be created in three communities, namely Mulgrave, Port Hawkesbury and Point Tupper, when the personnel now employed in carrying traffic by ferry and rail across the strait of Canso will be permanently unemployed. I am sure the residents of the area, in the solution to their problem, will have the active and considered assistance of the government of Canada.

Mr. Castleden: How many people will be affected?

Mr. MacEachen: The estimate varies. It may be from 200 to 400 or less; it is hard to predict.

I simply want to make one final point, Mr. Speaker, in commenting upon some of the remarks that have been made this afternoon and this evening. The comment is that no longer can any country exclusively control the movements of its own economy. This is particularly true of Canada because of its vulnerability to changes in world markets. For that reason one of the chief ingredients of a full employment policy for Canada is an increasing willingness to take part in all forms of international economic co-operation.

Mr. Alistair Stewart (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, I can quite honestly congratulate the hon. member for Inverness-Richmond (Mr. MacEachen) on a very distinguished maiden speech in this house. It certainly showed that before he came down here to speak he had studied his subject very carefully. I think we can also draw from his remarks the feeling that the government say to themselves, "We are all Keynesians now," but they are about 25 years too late. I do not think what J. M. Keynes suggested can at any time provide a solution to the perpetual problem of unemployment under the capitalist system.

I do not know whether or not the Conservatives recognized that this afternoon when they moved their amendment suggesting we should have a committee—I am not sure for what; to consider how the unemployed became so, or how we get unemployment—but I remember very vividly a few years ago when we in the C.C.F. were asking, at the time of rising prices, that there should be price control, and the then prime minister of Canada, Mr. Mackenzie King, offered to the house his solution, another parliamentary committee to consider how prices got where they were. I remember the then member for Cariboo, Mr. William Irvine, rising in this house and saying to the then prime minister, "If my right hon. friend saw a man drowning in a pool he would appoint a royal commission to find out how the devil the water got there"; and that was about the value of the committee, as it happened.

I do not think the Conservatives have any solution to the unemployment problem as it now exists. Obviously, from what we have heard from the government side, neither have they. They are both believers in the capitalist system of economics, and unemployment has been endemic under capitalism ever since we have known that system. They have never managed to find a solution except in time of war. I say there can be no solution under a capitalist system as long as the function of the system is to give the making of profit precedence over the rights of the great majority of the people.

One of the rights which I consider to be inalienable in any democratic society today is the right of a man to employment at reasonable rates of wages, and that fundamental human right is being denied in this country. When we bring unemployment to the attention of the government we get no answer, at least in the sense that the government has no solution to offer.

This afternoon the Minister of Labour gave an objective statement of the situation. He said that committees had been appointed, and he hoped we might get some valuable sug-