

Hon. R. DANDURAND: Honourable gentlemen, according to the ethics of my honourable friend, it would be apparently useless to give advice to the public: we should begin by trying individually to practice virtue. Yet there are facts that can be stated for people to examine and draw their own conclusions. We have this morning heard two very interesting disquisitions on the causes of unemployment and some remedies that should be applied.

I sat on the Committee, which heard the four or five witnesses representing the various activities that go to make up the economic life of this country, and one could not help realizing that one of the principal causes of unemployment, apart from the general economic situation of the world, was the wage question. The French have a saying, which is as old as France: "Quand le batiment va, tout va"—when the building trade is booming, everything is booming. The building trade is not booming just now. We hear that in the city of Ottawa it is almost paralyzed by a strike of the wage-earners in that industry; and why is it paralyzed? Because the wage-earners will not consent to a readjustment of their wages. Yet we are presented with a resolution unanimously adopted here in Ottawa last month by the building and construction industries of Canada, which declares among other things:

The General Committee of this Joint Conference of Employers and Employees in the Construction Industries begs to report that it has had three meetings during the sessions and has considered without hesitation some of the vital questions of our industry, with a view to aiding this conference in arriving at a satisfactory conclusion. The chief questions on which no agreement has been reached at this time either in committee or in the Conference itself are those of wages and the methods which have been used to obtain wage reductions.

After the most serious and careful consideration and with the full knowledge that we are not in any sense a legislative or authorized body, but a voluntary one, and therefore without jurisdictional powers, beg to recommend the following:

"Whereas there now exists a condition of either strike or lockout in our industry in several of our Canadian cities because of the so-called arbitrary reductions demanded by employers; and

"Whereas this condition is the result of a general abnormal situation, over which we could not possibly have any control; and

"Whereas the post-war unnatural high peak in cost of living and therefore in wages was passed last year; and

"Whereas in many important centres throughout Canada and adjacent U.S. points wage adjustments have been reached by mutual agreements or arbitration; and

"Whereas the chief deterring factor which prevents a real substantial reduction in cost of living is undoubtedly high rent; and

"Whereas it is realized by us that only the building of many thousands of dwellings can alleviate Canada's deplorable housing shortage; and

"Whereas we are as an industry to a slight degree responsible for this situation; and

"Whereas it has been conclusively shown in this Conference that building material prices have already been substantially reduced;

"Therefore be it resolved by this Conference, acting as individual builders and workers and not in our capacity as officers of any particular organization, and with the full realization that each locality must of necessity deal with its own peculiar situation, as follows:

"That in our best judgment a moderate and reasonable adjustment of wages should be agreed upon without further delay in such large centres, where an abnormally high peak has been reached and where no settlement has been accepted, and that such agreement should be fixed upon for a period of twelve months; and, further, that we strongly urge the immediate resumption of negotiations with a view to mutual agreement, and that failing mutual agreement, voluntary arbitration should be entered into.

"In conclusion, your General Committee feels that this action will tend to stabilize conditions by preventing an undue and abnormal drop in wages, and remove strikes, strife and distrust, and that a new post-war normal will more speedily be determined."

This resolution is signed by representatives of organized labour, one of the principal ones being Mr. A. Martel. Mr. Martel with others recognizes that the high cost of living is gradually, day by day, coming down. Yet that gentleman, when before our Committee, although he admitted the conditions, refused to state that he was willing to recommend, or that these organizations were ready to accept, a lowering of wages. He gave as his reason for that attitude the fact that rent and fuel were still going up. This gentleman admitted that the cost of labour represented 80 per cent of the cost of building. In this resolution he has admitted that the high cost of materials and labour prevent activity in the building trade. Yet he tells us that, so long as there is a shortage of houses and a consequent high rate of rentals, wages should not be diminished. This is obviously so illogical that I think it suffices to mention it for the ordinary labourer, who has some intelligence, to realize that he himself is the cause of the high rentals and of the unemployment in the building trades; for if he accepted a reasonable reduction in wages, not only when the material is assembled for the erection of a house, but also at the various mills where the material is prepared, then prices would come down and people would start to build. To my personal knowledge buildings are