

*Unemployment Insurance Act*

should be covered by unemployment insurance, this is the time. There are shortages of labour in Canada at the present time. Even unskilled workers who have no knowledge how to operate farm machinery are unwilling to work on our farms, simply because they are not covered by insurance benefits.

I brought this matter to the attention of the Minister of Labour and he was good enough to tell me this question would be dealt with. I take his word that consideration will be given to it, but I think it should be dealt with immediately because there will be a severe shortage of farm labour by the spring both in the west and in the east.

I believe the minister should give serious thought to letting the present bill go through. Let it go before the Standing Committee on Agriculture so that it can be implemented to the benefit of all those who are willing to work on our farms. I should like to remind hon. members that it was in 1957, before the government of that day was voted out of office, that the then minister of fisheries with the help of some of his colleagues was in a position to bring in legislation enabling fishermen on both the east and the west coasts to enjoy the benefits of the act. I am not suggesting that the fishermen should not be covered, even though they are self-employed. There was a need for these benefits. But I am blaming the members of parliament and the minister of agriculture from the western provinces because at that time they failed to bring farm labour under the provisions of the act. That was the time when action should have been taken. It is most regrettable that the fishermen were covered while farm labour was not taken into consideration.

I brought this bill to the attention of the former minister of labour, now minister of health. He assured me on more than one occasion that the Gill recommendation would be brought before the standing committee and that this matter would be debated. Of course, there have been two elections in succession, as it were, and this can be used as an excuse for delay. Nevertheless, there was plenty of time for the Minister of Labour to have presented this report.

The Gill report went thoroughly into the merits of the case for providing coverage to farm workers and it recommended that all those who worked should be covered by unemployment insurance, provided the administrative difficulties could be overcome. I cannot see why administrative difficulties

[Mr. Rapp.]

connected with the agriculture industry could not be overcome. There must be a means by which this legislation could be implemented. Today there is hardly anyone in the west who is willing to work on a farm. The industry is now highly mechanized. Scarcely anyone wishes to hire a man who works with horses. We use expensive implements—another reason why farm labour should be covered by insurance.

• (5:20 p.m.)

It is now skilful work and it would be wrong to entrust a combine costing \$8,000 or \$9,000, or a tractor costing \$5,000 or \$6,000 to someone with little skill or experience in handling such expensive machinery. I know there are many members on both sides of the house who are in favour of having unemployment insurance coverage given to farm labourers. For that reason I will yield the floor and let them express their views to show that this is a necessity. If ever there was a time when farm labour should be covered by the Unemployment Insurance Act, this is it.

**Mr. T. S. Barnett (Comox-Alberni):** Mr. Speaker, I am sure any hon. members who were members of the industrial relations committee in 1955, when the Unemployment Insurance Act was given a major overhaul, will recall that some of the members of that committee, including myself, made quite an effort to have it extended to cover farm labourers. However, our best efforts were unavailing and it has been a matter of considerable regret that, as a result, ever since that time the agricultural workers of Canada by and large have been excluded from the benefits of coverage.

I know the hon. member for Humboldt-Melfort-Tisdale (Mr. Rapp) has been a consistent advocate of extending coverage since I returned to the house in 1962. I can only say in passing that I have some regret that during the period he sat on the government side he was not able to persuade the government which he supported to implement the changes he recommends. But there is little point in dwelling on what might have happened in the past.

It should be apparent to any hon. member who has looked at the most recent brief presented by the Canadian Federation of Agriculture that the adoption of this bill is a matter of increasing urgency. One of the major points made in that brief dealt with the problem which Canadian farmers have in securing adequate farm workers, both with respect to skills and numbers. For that reason,