

Unemployment Insurance

to provide a shelf of public works which could be put into operation whenever unemployment became serious. I submit that the time has come for the implementation of that policy. The Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent), speaking particularly of the construction industry, was quoted in one of the Toronto daily papers on February 17 as follows:

Activity in the construction industry is still as buoyant as it has been since the end of the war, but it may be that we will shortly be moving into a new phase in which demand will not be quite so insistent.

That may not be altogether a bad thing. I am sure that many of you must have felt in recent years that a period of consolidation would have to come; that the spiral of increasing costs could not continue; and that, in the long run, everyone in the community, including your own industry, would benefit by the return of some pressure for higher productivity and somewhat lower production costs.

I take this statement to mean that it is the accepted policy of the government to invite such a period of unemployment as we have at the present time in order to provide a surplus of workers, so that costs of production may be reduced and productivity increased.

I think we should accept as a fact that the unemployment situation as it exists in Canada today is the responsibility of the federal government. In 1945 and 1949 the Liberal party took credit for the number of jobs that were available and for the general prosperity of the country. That, they told us from billboards and in other advertising, was the result of the policies of the Liberal government. By the same token, if they are going to take credit for the prosperity that existed during those years, they must take responsibility for the lack of jobs that is developing today. Whether or not the federal government should assume the financial responsibility in connection with providing jobs, certainly it is up to the federal government to take the initiative in bringing together governments at various levels so that when unemployment does strike us, as it is striking us today, public works programs will be available. Today we are actually back where we were before the war, as far as the unemployment situation is concerned. The federal government is passing the buck to the provincial governments; the provincial governments are passing it to the municipalities. The municipalities are coming back to the provincial governments and the federal government, and there has been practically no improvement in the last ten years, though it was realized that some steps should be taken to co-ordinate the efforts of governments at the three levels in order to meet this situation. Not until this fall are we to have a dominion-provincial conference to deal with responsibility of governments at various levels in regard to such social measures. For years opposition groups and

[Mr. Noseworthy.]

others have been clamouring for the government to bring together provincial and municipal authorities and take the initiative in bringing about some agreement so that when such situations develop we may be prepared for them.

Reference has been made to the fact that unemployment insurance, even as it may be improved by these amendments, will still provide less than the amount of relief paid in some of our municipalities. Unemployment insurance was never intended to take the place of employment. It was never intended to do more than tide a worker over the period of transition between losing one job and finding another; and we should never come to look upon unemployment insurance as a substitute for employment itself. From what I can gather the average married man receiving unemployment insurance gets something like \$16 a week. In the case of a man with three or four children \$16 a week, even if he were getting it for a period of time, would not be sufficient to maintain his family. In York township we pay in relief to a family of three \$60.88 a month, plus rent; to a family of four, \$84 a month plus rent; to a family of five, \$92 a month, plus rent; and to a family of seven \$125, plus rent. Unemployment insurance does not begin to maintain a family with five or six children, and can in no circumstances be expected to take the place of a weekly pay cheque.

Now there are one or two questions I want to ask the minister before I conclude. Within the last hour I have been informed by a member of the unemployment advisory committee that the amendments brought in this afternoon have not come before that committee, and that they have not been before the representatives of employees and employers who form that advisory committee.

Mr. Martin: Why not ask your questions later, on the bill, and let us get along?

Mr. Noseworthy: I have been informed that recommendations to the government by the advisory committee have been ignored in the measure now before the house. Further, I should like to know why the public hearing which was advertised for next Friday, having to do with bringing hospitals and public charitable institutions under the act, has been cancelled; and why no mention is made of that matter in this amendment.

Motion agreed to and the house went into committee, Mr. Beaudoin in the chair.

Some hon. Members: Six o'clock.

Mr. Martin: Could we not report the resolution? I think we are all agreed on it.

Some hon. Members: Six o'clock.

At six o'clock the committee took recess.