

The Address—Mr. Poulin

that the great majority of the unemployed are labourers and lumberjacks, and therefore not entitled to unemployment insurance benefits, makes the situation all the more serious. One readily realizes, Mr. Speaker, the alarming situation of those men who, for the most part, are heads of families. They have been out of work for the past four, six and even ten months and their only income is derived from family allowances which, useful as they may be, under the circumstances are admittedly inadequate to ensure a decent standard of living. And yet the situation would not be so serious if all those who are fortunate enough to have a job were being paid fair wages.

Speaking in this house on February 20 last, the right hon. Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent), as reported at page 53 of *Hansard*, stated:

Our pulp and paper people felt that it would be a prudent thing to reduce the size of their inventories in which so much of their working capital was tied up at rather high costs of production.

I admit these production costs are rather high, but the companies have reduced their inventories. They have not omitted, however, to reduce, in a shameful manner, the price paid to small operators for pulpwood, and the salaries paid to woodcutters for job work. In view of the price the paper companies get for pulp, it really is a shame that they should be allowed to pay these forest labourers the meagre wages they force them to accept with a knife at their throat, if I may say so. The forest labourer is not concerned with the fact that the paper companies have reduced their inventories. He is uneasy and wonders what has suddenly happened in the pulp industry that his salary should be cut by one-half or even two-thirds, while paper is still selling as high as a year or two ago, and even higher.

Last week I went through my constituency. It is inhabited by responsible people, by good workers who usually earn their living through hard work. A year or two ago, those people were getting between \$5 and \$7 to cut a cord of wood; this winter, under almost identical conditions, the companies are only paying \$3, \$2.50 and even \$2. Would that be the result of exploitation by a combine or trust? With bitterness and resentment, the forest labourer ponders over the question. This would undoubtedly be an excellent field of inquiry for the investigating body that has become famous since last year's report on the flour milling industry.

Mr. Lesage: Will the hon. member permit a question? Is he aware that a provincial law deals with minimum salaries for forest labourers in Quebec? Under the circumstances the law is administered by the provincial government. Therefore, as the matter concerns workers of the province of Quebec, it should be referred to Mr. Duplessis.

Mr. Poulin: I am perfectly aware of that legislation. It hardly matters what political party has the right and duty to see that people abide by the law. As far as I am concerned, I avail myself of the means at my disposal to defend the lumberjacks' rights.

In any case, I have not blamed the federal government for lumberjacks' low wages. If any combine is operating, however, this is a splendid opportunity for the investigating commission I mentioned earlier to resume its task. I therefore urge with all the energy I can muster that lumberjacks be paid wages worthy of human beings.

If the government should ever decide to undertake public works for the relief of unemployment in the Beauce district, our municipalities would gladly supply a list of practical, useful, feasible and reasonable projects that would prove an asset to our parishes.

Discussing means to relieve unemployment, the Prime Minister also stated in the house, on February 20 last, as reported on page 58 of *Hansard*:

But there will inevitably be some residuary problems from time to time in some areas, and the initiative in dealing with them must be taken by the local authorities.

That is, in my opinion, exactly what local authorities are doing and that is why the heads of municipalities in my constituency sent me several resolutions and petitions asking the federal government to help them solve a problem with which they did not feel competent to deal.

These municipal governments are acquainted with local needs. Better than anyone else, including members of the cabinet and the representatives of all the parties in this house, they know that inadequate means are at their disposal to meet these needs. Our parish authorities know perfectly well that local governments are not capable of coping with this crisis. Our municipal governments are prepared, or should be, to do their share, in a very small way, of course, towards paying for these projects I mentioned a moment ago.

Everywhere enlightened people ask us to intensify the struggle against communism