

Unemployment Relief

Now, what I wish to bring to the particular attention of the committee and of the government is this, that after this legislation has been enacted in its vague terms, especially this clause, what does it mean? It means that the governor in council is allowed to spend \$20,000,000, for the sake, it is true, of relieving unemployment. But at the same time if you look through the other clauses of the bill, if you apply the various explanations and answers that have been given as to the spending of this money under this unqualified and unreserved power, the government may, without any further legislation or control, initiate public works of all kinds—some of which would ordinarily come from the marine department, others from the public works department, others from the railway department. It may likewise grant to the provinces and the municipalities moneys for all sorts of things under various provincial laws.

Now, this being carried to its logical conclusion, what does it mean? It means that in any future session, so long as this problem of unemployment remains—and it is upon us and upon the world for many years to come—under pretence of an emergency, any government could come before parliament and ask for a lump sum of money, which it could spend how it liked, either on public works, on railway building, on marine developments, on grants to the provinces and the municipalities. Without any control by parliament it could go on from year to year substracting from the supervision and the authority of parliament a growing portion of its budget. Carried to its final conclusion, it would mean this, that any government could come before parliament and say: Because we are fresh from the people, because we have received a mandate from the people, we ask you to vote \$400,000,000 to carry on the government of this country. And this money, without curtailing the general and undefined powers of the government, could be made use of for building railways, breakwaters and various public works, and for the exercise of all the functions of government. In other words, under the influence of an extraordinary situation, we would abandon one of the basic principles of parliamentary control which have grown up and have been established by law, by practice and by the constitution because of the experiences of the past.

It must not be thought that the abuses to which governments in the past have resorted were all due to the caprice of men, and that they may not be attempted again. Many kings and many governments meant well; but

[Mr. Bourassa.]

because they were not under control, because they were not obliged to give an account for all the money they spent—money got by taxes levied on the people—abuses grew; and when they became so strong that they could not be remedied otherwise, revolution followed. Look at the origin of the socialistic movements in the various countries of Europe and you will find things of this nature. Kings and governments probably were animated by good intentions, but they thought it would be handier to do away with legal enactments or with traditional precautions in order to accomplish their purposes in an easier fashion. We must be guarded against that.

When the resolution was before us, I stated, and I repeat it now, I would be the last to ask unreasonable things from the government. I admit with them that the situation is grave and urgent. I admit with them—and I think I stated it even before the government, if not in these terms—that under those circumstances we may stretch somewhat the boundaries of rules and precedents, but not to the length of losing sight of all safeguards, present or future.

I agree with my hon. friend from Winnipeg North Centre that when it comes to a matter of life and death, very often in this country the basis principles of justice and the most elementary dictates of human charity have been forgotten by reason of legal quibbles. But that is not the situation here. Does my hon. friend really believe that there will be any impediment to the legitimate exercise of the powers asked for by the government in the fact that we require that certain precautions shall be taken in the expenditure of this money? This government has already been in power a month now. It embraces some men of ability and practical knowledge. I credit the Prime Minister with being above the average so far as breadth of conception and strength of will are concerned. Surely therefore, when they were contemplating a measure of this character, they must have given some consideration to the manner of its execution. As the former Minister of Justice has stated, when they thought of launching new public works in order to provide work for the unemployed, they must have formed some idea as to what some of those works would be. When they speak of encouraging the railways to build branch lines, it must have occurred to them where some of those branch lines would be constructed. They have ascertained from the labour bureau, from the mayors of all the cities and towns of the Dominion with a population of over 10,000, the most accurate cal-