

Unemployment Insurance

I was speaking the other day to one man with a family of twelve who had been working for the past eight months and was now back in Canada unable to draw benefits. This is an injustice. These people deserve the protection of this government. I am sure—and I was assured this afternoon by none other than the governor of Maine himself—that if an agreement were the only solution to paying these people, it could easily be worked out. But only one letter has been sent. I repeat and repeat again; one little effort has been made. How can we expect to get results from one little letter? I will say this: the letter does expose the problem. An acknowledgement of that letter was received, but that was all that was done.

Until this settlement can be worked out I say this is a very severe situation. It is a crippling situation for hundreds of families, not only in my riding but in all ridings along the eastern border. If we can succeed in obtaining a reciprocity agreement with one state, let no one tell me we cannot obtain similar agreements with others. But if we start with a defeatist attitude and expect one letter written on November 8, 1957 to be still remembered in the state of Maine when two governors have come along since then, then we are mistaken. Results can be obtained, but you have to make some positive effort to attain them.

Governor Reed was surprised to think I should telephone him this afternoon but he was very pleased that I took the trouble. I discussed this problem with Governor Clauson last summer when he was fortunate enough to come to my riding for a day. These people are prepared to negotiate an agreement, I give you that assurance. But we do not seem to have the welfare of these woodsmen at heart to the degree needed to permit us to go down there and negotiate an agreement.

I certainly wish to compliment the speakers who spoke before me in this debate. Many of them have given very valid reasons for action being required to alleviate the plight of these thousands of people. Many of us this afternoon talked about potato diggers, and the hon. member for Charlotte (Mr. Stewart) gave pretty exact figures with regard to potato diggers who work in Maine and cannot draw unemployment benefits. If they cannot draw unemployment benefits in Canada, how can we expect them to draw them in Maine? Let us put our own house in order and then these people will get unemployment benefits from the state of Maine.

If there is one series of injustices hidden in this unemployment insurance, it is this discrimination. Mr. Speaker, do you mean to tell me that because a man has only fourteen stamps and the other fellow fifteen, he

cannot draw one cent while the other man can draw for something like fifteen weeks?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think the hon. member is getting away from the subject matter of the motion. I have given him enough leeway, I think, and he should cooperate with the Chair.

Mr. Van Horne: I certainly wish to assure you, Mr. Speaker, that my wish is to cooperate. I was merely referring to the other remarks made in the debate, which remarks were apparently very much in order.

I can remember when we were in the opposition that the same efforts were being made then to try and obtain reciprocity agreements with the states of Maine, Vermont and others. I can very well recall going into the matter then and finding the same thing we find now, one letter in two or three years. But, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make the same offer now as I made in the old days in the opposition. I am offering to secure reciprocity agreements with Maine, and if I cannot do it in three months I will resign my seat. That should be fair enough.

Mr. H. J. Michaud (Kent, N.B.): Mr. Speaker, I had made up a few notes in respect to the present debate, but following the remarks which have been made by the previous speaker I am more or less at a loss to make the observations I intended to make. First of all, I intended making the point that everybody this afternoon seemed to be under the impression that the present Minister of Labour (Mr. Starr) as well as the previous minister was to be commended for the effort made to bring about a favourable solution to this problem. We have just been told that that effort consisted of one single letter written during the last two years. That is a matter, I think, which had better be cleared up before we carry on any further with this debate.

Mr. Speaker, there was very little I intended to say about this matter at the present time. In the first place, my interest in this motion revolves around the fact that it concerns the question of employment in this country. From the remarks made by the mover of this resolution, the hon. member for Beauce (Mr. Racine), I understand that an agreement was reached for the year 1959 whereby 9,000 workmen from Canada would be permitted to cross over to the United States for employment in the woods, and that of these 9,000 people about half took advantage of the situation. I think it is regrettable that this should be the case in view of the present unemployment picture in the country. I have no doubt the full number of experienced lumbermen are available in Canada; I know we have