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April 19, 23



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NEWFOUNDLAND GOVERNMENT RAILWAY

Proceedings At The Legislative Council.

(Continued.)

February 24, 1925.

The Council met at 4.05 pursuant to adjournment.

HON. DR. ROBINSON submitted draft of Address in Reply to His Excellency's Speech from the Throne, which was moved and read a first time.

HON. MR. GIBBS said that before the motion was put he desired to make a few observations in reference to the Hon. the Leader of the Government's speech at last session, and which appeared in the press as the official report. The Hon. Leader of the Government was quoted as saying "if the Government went to work and attempted to prescribe hours of work and rates of wages what would happen?" No one, said Mr. Gibbs, advocated the fixing of wages by the Government. Hon. Mr. McNamara did draw attention to the rate of wages paid on Bell Island and in the Sydneys, but no suggestion that the Government should fix a schedule of wages was made. The Government had a right to fix hours of working, but with the matter of wages he believed the matter should be settled through collective bargaining. The Government had a right, however, to protect the physical welfare of our workmen and not expose them to risks which might deprive them of their health and strength. The Government have a right to say to employers that eight hours a day is long enough to work when the welfare of the people is concerned. On Bell Island miners have to shovel 16 tons of ore a day for the wages they receive, whether they do it in eight hours or less, and it is not sound argument that these men should continue to work for ten hours and shovel 3 or 4 tons more. Men will accustom themselves to a certain physical strain, but when one passes that strain and does more work he is bound to overtax his strength. A man might run twenty miles one day, but it does not say that he can keep the same pace for three or four days. On Bell Island the miners work under great strain. Some work all day in oil clothes, others work in their underclothing and with a candle in their caps, while they are engaged. Go to the mouth of the pit, see these men when they reach the surface, and look at their condition. Their faces do not wear a smile or a look of cheerfulness, or pleasantness. They are worn and haggard looking after their toil and bear marks of fatigue. It is the right of the Government to improve these conditions.

Under the covering of plausible sophistry, the Hon. Mr. Morine advances the dangerous preference of dole to the provision of suitable employment by the Government for the unemployed. He presents to us the unsatisfactory and irregular conditions which prevailed during the past few years when the rock sheds were open and shovelling offered to those out of employment. Having thus emitted his smoke screen, he hastily and impulsively concludes with an air of finality, that the dole is the proper and correct means of meeting the problem of unemployment and that other proposed solutions do not contain sufficient weight to merit even momentary consideration. The Hon. gentleman in arguing thus, had fixed upon his conclusion before he had prepared the proof of his thesis; and thus judiciously selected the plausible points in favour of his proposition and dilated upon the ostensibly unfavourable aspects of the means utilised in the past. With a foresight and wariness that is remarkable, he has studiously avoided consideration and comment upon the more objectionable aspects of relief by dole, and the more favourable arguments for the supplying of suitable employment. The method of argument is designed to catch the unthinking, but its foundation will not bear scrutiny. The first Bill introduced in Parliament in England 1907. It was the first bill enunciating the right to work.

Under Elizabethan Statutes Parish authorities were bound to provide work for the unemployed, first voluntary subscribed but later raised by tax. Sir Lyndan Macasey, L.L.D.

D.Sc., Board of Trade Arbitration, says:

"The justification for them is, that when an humanitarian ground, payments have to be made out of public or municipal funds for the maintenance of unemployed persons and their dependents, it is better, instead of giving a dole without requiring any work, to ask for work which may confer some benefit on the community paying wages for it. It is wholly unnecessary to emphasize the evil of doles whatever form they may take, whether Poor Law, Outdoor Relief, or anything else. I have had many cases under my personal notice of men, who, being offered work at reasonable rates of pay, refused to take it, stating that they were doing better out of their various payments for unemployment."

When the elections were upon us last year and the present Government were presenting their cause to the country, one of the strongest planks of their platform was the proposed tilting of squandermania. The extravagances of the late Government were stressed and enlarged in every manner possible.

The present Prime Minister promised that the people's money would be expended in a manner which would ensure good returns. This cry fixed itself in the people's imagination. For that purpose, in particular, the present Government was given the management of the country; and the members for St. John's made representatives with such decisive majorities. The very people who made those majorities so marked in St. John's, were the people who had been employed in the Rock Sheds. Their action should not be taken as evidence that they disapproved of the Government's handling of the unemployment problem for the concrete and the constructive object in view, but as an unalterable and uncontrollable proof that better returns should be made, that more beneficial work should be offered them. The common sense of the crowd is always a good criterion of ultimate work. You have had their verdict, we have heard your platform, and now we ask for some effort to produce tangible results. You throw up your hands in holy horror, and thank God you are not like other men when the word squander is repeated. When any of the deeds of the late Government were spoken of you cry, "Unclean" and run to cover, but look to yourselves.

Weekly there is paid out of the funds of this Colony, over \$10,000.00 in pauper Relief, and what returns are made for it? Is this squandermania or shall we term it the charitable efforts of an all wise and all provident Government, which can do no wrong?

If I denounce the present method of the Government as

impracticable, unethical and injudicious, and ask that in its place there should be substituted employment on some public work, which will prove a lasting benefit to the Colony, it is illogical to draw the inference therefrom that I support the repetition of what occurred in the past. It would be absurd for anyone to deny the statement that value was not given by the unemployment for the money which was expended on relief during the past few years. It is not my intention to do so. But, it is upon the painting of extreme pictures of these irregularities that the Government hope to palliate and excuse their present act. By the presentation of such incidents, they emit the smoke screen, and then spring this odd and peculiar conclusion. Let us penetrate the mist. Dealing with the matter of the much offending form of relief, has it ever occurred to the Government that perhaps it was not the means adopted in past years which was wholly at fault, that perhaps it was the manner in which the solution of the problem was applied, which was productive of many of the unsatisfactory results? Has it ever occurred that perhaps the extensiveness of unemployment, the unsettled condition of affairs, the effect of the cessation of hostilities were no uncertain mal-producing elements, which may have contributed to the unsatisfactory results. Apparently they did not occur to them, nor apparently did they entertain the most noticeable fact, that many of those disturbing elements have so diminished as to be almost non-existing. But, even with the disappearance of some of those elements, it is to be admitted that such work as rock-breaking and snow-shovelling ought not to be considered if more permanent and more productive work can be found. In an undeveloped country such as ours, whose public service are so needful of improvement, surely, work of a permanent character is to be found. Undoubtedly as Hon. Mr. Morine says, it is much more preferable to commence work during the summer months. But at present, we are which we cannot exercise preference with a difficulty upon reference. Before us is stern necessity. To enumerate works of a constructive character and give detail is unnecessary. But I might mention the basin above the Long Bridge which could be dredged, a concrete wall built along the Southside to serve as a mooring for schooners and thus relieve congestion in the harbour and make more room about the dock and railway premises. Some say concrete work cannot be done in winter but the 100 foot chimney at the Hospital was built in winter, the Newfoundland Clothing Factory the same, much of the masonry on the Royal Bank building was done in the winter and in January and some of it was put up in a temperature of 20 to 30 degrees below zero. It is almost as practicable to handle concrete in winter as in summer. Other works could be done, and

instead of \$10,000 a week going out for nothing something could be accomplished for it.

So much for the distinction between the means itself and the method of application. But the attempt to delude becomes more objectionable, when there is offered for our thought and analysis the statement that "whatever could be said of dole, nothing could be said in favour of giving out work as in the past," and further, "It was wrong and a greater disgrace to accept money for work that was non-productive and which nobody wanted." "Come let us reason together." I have yet to hear of work, which absolutely speaking is non-productive. Relatively, economically such a distinction exists in a greater or less degree, but absolutely speaking, all work does some good, be it great, be it small. Dole is something given for nothing; something which does not require the performance of any work. When rock-breaking, road-making and snow-shovelling were given the men some returns were made and some benefit was derived from it. Inasmuch therefore, as there was work given as the means abandoned superior to the dole system. The unemployed are receiving money which the country can ill afford to give, but, unfortunately must give. Could not returns be made for that money to place a constructive programme before the unemployed and the executive ability to-day, unemployment is a burning question and the under em-

answer because the Government have not the initiative and endeavour to see the course once decided upon is carried out? By their indifference in this matter they are not only placing an extra burden on taxpayers, receiving no benefit for that burden, but giving a certain sanction to idleness, and above all, giving the two-edged sword of idleness from the simple but instructive words of F. R. Fairchild, Professor of Political Economy at Yale University. He says, "People are misled by forgetting the real purpose of all work. We do not work for the sake of working. Work is a means, not an end. The purpose of work is to enable us to have the products of labour to satisfy our wants. The greater number of workers and the more efficiently they work, the greater will be the product to be divided. People living in idleness are not an advantage to the workers. On the contrary, for every idle member of the community those that work must work harder and have less to show for it."

Unemployment may be generally classed as follows:—

- (1) The vagrant;
- (2) Those mentally or physically unfit.
- (3) The under-employed; and
- (4) The unemployed.

In greater or lesser degree all classes are practically inseparable from modern city life. But to-day, unemployment is a burning question and the under em-

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W. J. WALSH,

Minister Agriculture & Mines.

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NOTICE

To Owners and Masters of British Ships

The attention of Owners and Masters of British Ships is called to the 7th Section of the "Merchant Shipping Act, 1894."

75.—(1) A Ship belonging to a British Subject shall hoist the proper national colors—
(a) on a signal made to her by one of His Majesty's ships indicating any vessel under the command of an officer of His Majesty's navy or full pay, and
(b) on entering or leaving any foreign port and
(c) if of fifty tons gross tonnage or upwards, on entering or leaving any British Port.

(2) If default is made on board any ship in complying with this section the master of the ship shall for each offence be liable to a fine not exceeding one hundred pounds.

At time of war it is necessary for every British Ship to hoist the colours and heave to if signalled by a British Warship; if a vessel hoists no colours and runs away, it is liable to be fired upon.
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