

*Unemployment*

we do not know; we are talking in the dark, I suppose—we assume are to be business men, and that this is to be looked at as a business proposition. I say that if we are going to strike out subsection 2, the least that can be done would be to have inserted in so many words an understanding whereby in any agreement entered into with any corporation, partnership or individual, fair wage provisions would be maintained. That is the least that could be done.

Let us suppose by any stretch of the imagination an agreement were entered into with a textile company with regard to the employment of textile workers. What are the wages in textile factories to-day, which are being investigated by a commission? They are outrageously low. I am not at all sure that these business men on the commission could be entrusted with seeing that fair wages are paid to people absorbed into a textile industry. I can readily understand that the ground might be taken that as the people were unemployed, and are getting nothing to-day, any wage would be good enough for them. That would have the effect of putting them on a very low wage and depressing the whole wage scale.

I can recall that when the Liberal party held office some years ago the steel companies were under consideration, and assistance was being given by way of bonus. At that time we tried to have inserted a fair wage clause as a condition under which the steel companies might receive bonuses, but the government of that day, headed by the present Prime Minister, refused to insert such a clause. This was not a matter of provincial jurisdiction, because the federal government was free to state definitely the conditions under which these bonuses and special grants could be given. I think the country ought to be protected, whether or not there is any protection of the rights of parliament, and it would not be too much to ask the Prime Minister, who proposes to withdraw the control of parliament—and I am not objecting to that—to insert in place of subsection 2 a safeguard for labour along the lines I have suggested. Perhaps the wording might be changed but this is what I scribbled down just a moment ago:

In any agreement entered into with any corporation, partnership or individual fair wage provisions must be maintained.

I think that is only fair to labour, and it is in line with the proposals which have been made from time to time by the Liberals in convention and scattered broadcast through-

[Mr. Woodsworth.]

out the country. I would like to see such a provision inserted so that the commission itself would know that it was bound by the action of parliament in that regard.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: I think what my hon. friend has in mind is pretty completely covered by an existing act of parliament with respect to public moneys which are contributed. The provisions of the fair wage act, as I recall it, apply to works aided by grants of public funds. I think that legislation would be quite broad enough to cover what my hon. friend has in mind.

Mr. WOODSWORTH: But we have been told again and again that the government has no control over private business, that the fair wage clause applies to particular government contracts but that it does not necessarily apply, for example, to materials produced entirely outside government shops or government contracts. We were told not so very long ago that it did not apply to Canadian National railway contracts, and to Canadian Pacific railway contracts, I believe. I do not think it is asking too much—especially when the Prime Minister says that this is government policy—to have a fair wage clause explicitly included in some such words as I have suggested. If the government will not accept that suggestion, I will move an amendment accordingly.

The CHAIRMAN (Mr. McPhee): There is an amendment now before the Chair.

Mr. BENNETT: Speaking to the amendment and the observations made by the Prime Minister, may I direct his attention to the fact that under Bill No. 14 to which he has referred, it is provided that a commission may be appointed by the governor in council. He has now intimated to us this evening who the chairman of the commission is to be, without any order in council having been passed with respect to the matter because he intimated that the names of the others could not be given. Such a departure from parliamentary practice I have never heard of in my time, and if I had ever been guilty of it I would have been lectured by my right hon. friend for at least half an hour.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: My right hon. friend surely does not assert that we have to pass an order in council before I may be permitted to tell the house who the chairman of a commission is to be?

Mr. BENNETT: Absolutely.