

Unemployment is usually at a minimum in September - rises to a peak in the late winter.

Thus 1955 is repeating a pattern that is all too familiar to the Canadian people, for seasonal unemployment is a perennial problem here, present in good times or bad. It affects all of us, because of the reduced purchasing power of those who are out of work. It is estimated that 250,000 persons are seasonally unemployed each winter, even in years of generally high employment. The annual loss in wages is probably about 150 million dollars, with its inevitable impact on the demand for services and goods produced by other people. Even more important is the damage it causes in the places that really count - in the hearts and minds of the human beings who are out of work.

This problem is, in a way, one of the penalties for living in a country such as Canada with its sharp variations in climate. It has various facets. Obviously one type of seasonal unemployment is caused by the direct effects of climate on the production process in many of our primary industries. Canadian farmers cannot plant wheat in February. Ice makes inland navigation impracticable in winter and fishermen face great difficulties. The canning industry must obviously curtail its operations during the winter months when fresh fruit and vegetables are not available. The construction industry cannot generally be expected to hold the same pace during the rigorous winter that it does during spring, summer and fall, unless special advance plans are made. About this point I shall have something more to say a little later.

But in other industries seasonal unemployment is caused not so much by climate as by employers' and consumers' habits - it is the market rather than the production process that is affected by the time of year. An example is the retail trade, which is at a peak from October to December - the Christmas shopping season. The clothing industry has peaks in the spring and fall when the weather and the fashions change. Demand for agricultural implements is naturally highest in spring and summer. Various service industries - hotels, restaurants, laundries and dry cleaning establishments - reach peak activity in July, August and September.

Now the Federal Government has been deeply concerned with the problem of winter unemployment. I would hardly be raising such a thorny subject today if we weren't. Our unemployment insurance program, while it does not of course solve the problem, does help the plight of the individual worker who is forced to be idle through no fault of his own. A large part of the unemployment insurance benefits paid out in a year are paid during the winter months - in some years, for example, 65 per cent of the total amount paid was given out in the five months from December to April. The government has specifically recognized the problem of seasonal unemployment by providing supplementary unemployment insurance benefits from January 1 to April 15 every year. But you might well ask what is being done to get at the roots, to reduce winter unemployment itself, and more particularly, what is being done by the Federal Government? The government is doing things but I must say at once that the solution depends on all groups in the community - on the willingness of industry to change established employment patterns and on the willingness of the general public to change its habits in buying and in demanding services.