

The Budget—Mr. Mongrain

● (5:20 p.m.)

I do not think it is correct to say that 6.7 per cent of our workers are unemployed compared to 5 per cent last year. We must ask ourselves if the international situation is not a little bit responsible for that. If no steps had been taken, would things be better or worse?

It is obvious that the government has failed up to now to eliminate unemployment. It is certain also that it will not succeed without the co-operation of provinces, manufacturers and labour unions. But at least it took steps to prevent the situation from becoming worse and even to improve it in several fields.

For my part, I am sure that I speak for all my fellow-citizens when I thank the government for its efforts in order to reduce unemployment. As a positive suggestion, one could perhaps ask the government to organize, if possible, summer camps for university students who want to work. Two birds could perhaps be killed with one stone. These students would first of all be given the opportunity to earn some money with which to pay their tuition fees. In this way, instead of loafing through the summer, they could work for the municipal, provincial or federal governments, helping to develop our natural resources, such as our forests and our lakes, and also to reduce air and water pollution.

The youth of today would like to see such an organization being set up. I recall that there was at one time in the United States an organization known as the Civil Conservation Corps, which was devoted to keep university students busy in summer camps. If I remember well, that was at the end of the economic recession of 1930-39. Outstanding results were achieved by that organization.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague the hon. member for Bellechasse for having mentioned the chaos in the textile industry, and I agree with his remarks. The Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Pepin) and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) as well as their experts are looking after that problem. Indeed, I had the opportunity to meet them on many occasions, and I would like to repeat what the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe (Mr. Ricard) has already said, and confirm what the hon. member for Bellechasse has just said. I therefore wish to remind our government that the situation is urgent.

There is in my constituency a textile industry which has 2,100 employees. When I meet the management, they tell me how much they

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are concerned about the present conditions and they suggest some solutions which seem satisfactory to me. I would therefore ask the government to consider as positively as possible this urgent problem which is in danger of increasing unemployment.

Some companies, because they did not retrain their employees or did not modernize their equipment on time, are condemned to disappear. We have to resign ourselves to that fact. But there are others, and I am thinking of Wabasso Cotton in my constituency which has always had the latest equipment and the best working conditions. It deserves, on account of its efforts, some consideration from the government for itself and its employees.

It seems there are some 85,000 workers in the textile industry in Ontario and Quebec, a substantial figure. I will read part of a communication from the Canadian Institute of Textiles which I have here:

—the Canadian industry of yarns and cottons invested an estimated \$10.9 million as capital or maintenance expenditures in 1968. The amount was \$21.7 million in 1967 and, according to estimates by investors it will be \$11.2 million in 1969.

Therefore, the textile industry made efforts to modernize its equipment and to give new training to its workers in order to meet the competition of countries where wages are 15 to 25 times lower than in Canada.

In spite of all these improvements, the textile industry is in deep trouble. Statistics show that in 1965, woven cotton and synthetic fibres produced by Canadian mills accounted for merely 57 per cent of the Canadian consumer market. The rest came from abroad. In 1969, this figure had declined to 52.5 per cent. According to the leaders of the textile industry, this is an alarming rate of decrease, and they suggest, after conducting studies on what is done elsewhere, that Canada is probably the only country which does not enforce quotas high enough to protect its industry. In their opinion, at least 65 to 70 per cent of the Canadian textile production should be absorbed by the Canadian market. In Japan, there are laws, they say, requiring those who import textile products to secure special permits from the government which grants them only if it is deemed essential to the development of the Japanese industry.

The problem is not that simple, Mr. Speaker, for we have to consider international trade and maintain a trade balance in this field. Japan buys more goods from Canada than we buy from that country, but it is inconsistent to let our textile industry deteri-