

The next question was that of labour supply. I have a statement before me which furnishes some answer to the question as to what happened recently in packing plants. I was in the west on the 17th of April and met a number of representatives of producers in Alberta. I was in Calgary and met there most of those who were interested in the problem then developing in the packing plants in Calgary, Edmonton and Winnipeg. Representations were made to the effect that farmers were being asked to retain their hogs at home until the rush of deliveries at the plants could be taken care of. The difficulty which developed at that time was largely owing to the fact that we have been following certain practices in connection with farm labour. Ever since the spring of 1942 it has been provided in our regulations that those who are essential to agriculture are given postponements in the matter of military service, but the postponements are conditional upon the men remaining on the farm. During the past two winters provision has been made for farm labour leaving the farm in the winter months and going into necessary work such as work in the bush, in the coal mines and in these packing plants, but the definite undertaking was given that these men would be returned to the farms in the spring, leaving whatever activities they had been engaged in during the winter. Accordingly, we had a number of these men in the packing plants during the winter months who, in the month of March, began to move back to the farm in compliance with the regulations.

The hon. member has asked what was done to cope with the problem. All I can say is that immediately those representations were made I wired to the Minister of Labour. He was in Philadelphia at that time, so that the matter was immediately taken up by his deputy and inside of a few hours I had a wire from him which indicated that something was being done to take care of the problem which was developing. The Minister of Labour can explain what was done to better effect than I can. It was to assure those who were working in the packing plants that if they remained there they would have protection against the regulation that they must return to the farm in the spring, provided that they themselves were agreed that they should remain in the plants. That, of course, did not fully take care of the matter because some of them had already gone home and could not return to the plants on account of the labour situation on their own farms. At that time I took the trouble to interview Mr. Robert Gardiner, president of the United Farmers of Alberta, and suggested to him that the surest way of dealing with the problem was for farm labour to be so organized that we could utilize as

much as possible of it in the packing plants whether in the winter or in the summer months so long as it was needed there, the idea being that if we are to assure the farmers of a certain amount of labour to produce the live stock which is necessary for the prosecution of the war, the labour necessary to process that live stock is just as essential to the war effort and this indicates that the plants should be considered as part of the farming operations, so far as it was possible to do so. The Department of Labour got to work on the problem immediately, and that is the situation as it exists at present. The farm organizations in western Canada have been appealed to, to co-operate with the government in organizing that labour. Provincial governments have also been appealed to. They all have organizations working on it, and my understanding is that the problem is being dealt with as effectively as possible under the conditions existing.

In order to illustrate what has been happening, let us take the period from April 29 to May 13. At the plants at Vancouver there were seven fewer men working on May 13 than on April 29. In Alberta there were 117 more employees on May 13 than on April 29, 243 having been taking on and 126 having left, making a net gain of 117 employees. That does not cover the whole period with which I am now dealing, but it does cover a very considerable part of it. In Saskatchewan 172 had been hired in that period and 136 had left the plant. The Winnipeg position is that there are eighty-three more employed now than were employed before; and I put figures on the record to show that at about the period of this first date there were more men in these plants, taking them as a whole, than were in them in January. So that there has not been any decline in the amount of labour available at these plants; as a matter of fact there has been more labour put into the plants than has gone out of them, and the plants are operating to the best possible advantage. The total in so far as the position across the country is concerned is that there were 320 more employees in the packing plants on May 13 than there were on April 29, and I assume that an improvement has taken place over the past ten days.

Mr. CASTLEDEN: How many of these are women?

Mr. GARDINER: I have not the breakdown of that.

Mr. CASTLEDEN: The packing-house workers wanted equal pay for women who are doing equal work. I wish to know whether that principle is in effect in Canadian packing plants at the present time.