

Unemployment

In the few minutes left at my disposal I wish to make another point and that is the apparent assertion on the part of this government that the provinces are not too anxious concerning whether or not the subject of unemployment is included in the agenda of any future dominion-provincial conference.

We in this group have pressed upon the government the need for such an inclusion in the agenda. We have been met with that characteristic shrugging of shoulders and the shaking of the head. The Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) has gone so far as to say he has no doubt that someone will raise the point and it will be discussed. But the assumption, as I have gathered it from government statements, is that no province in particular has been very interested in the matter. Rather, we have been told that the provinces and municipalities have a good deal of responsibility in this unemployment. I am certain the provinces and municipalities will do what they can but this is quite a contradiction of the original statement made by the government which led us to believe from away back between 1940 and 1945 the government definitely assumed responsibility in regard to the employment of employable unemployed.

I know that my time is short and I must hurry along. As to the suggestion that it is only a matter of probability that any province would want to have the matter of unemployment discussed, I would like to read from clippings from my home paper, the *Star-Phoenix*, which I have gathered in the last few days. While I cannot quote at any length I shall read the headlines of articles on this subject.

The first headline reads:

Premier Douglas again—

—and I emphasize “again”—

Premier Douglas again asks St. Laurent to call federal-provincial conference on farm costs, unemployment problems.

The next headline appeared in the March 10, 1955, issue of the paper and it reads:

Douglas urges St. Laurent call meet on unemployment.

I think, Mr. Speaker, I have time to quote from this next article:

The Saskatchewan provincial federation of labour, T.L.C., and the Saskatchewan federation of labour, C.C.L., have forwarded to me—

—that is, to Premier Douglas—

—a joint brief urging the calling of a federal-provincial conference to deal with the problems arising out of increasing unemployment.

This request is in keeping with a suggestion which I have made several times that a federal-provincial conference be convened for the purpose of implementing and co-ordinating a public investment program throughout Canada and particularly in those areas adversely affected by unemployment.

[Mr. Knight.]

Now, as to the province's own suggestion that the federal government meet in order that the province might take action, he continues:

This year the government of Saskatchewan will undertake the largest capital expenditure in its history with a view to stimulating construction and providing as much employment as possible. A number of our municipalities are also undertaking heavy capital commitments designed to provide increased employment opportunities.

However, there is a limit to the amount of money which provincial and municipal governments can borrow for the purpose of financing public projects.

Then, to clinch the matter, I have this further article the headline of which reads:

Province has been asking for talks on unemployment since 1949, Douglas avers.

And in a statement which Premier Douglas issued to the press he says:

As far back as July 15, 1949, I wrote Prime Minister St. Laurent requesting a federal-provincial conference to discuss responsibility for able-bodied unemployed. On September 22, 1949, I repeated this request and in August, 1950, I submitted to the Prime Minister a proposed agenda for the federal-provincial conference covering such questions as unemployment and national health insurance.

That is the only point which I shall have time to make. I simply wish to say that any suggestion that the premiers of the provinces are not anxious to have the subject of unemployment raised or included in the agenda of any future dominion-provincial conference is totally and completely false.

In taking my seat I wish to urge once again that this government take some immediate action and at the same time work out some long-term arrangement which, despite the difficulties with which our economic structure is afflicted, might at least stave off unemployment for a period of years and provide the comfort of assurance of work for the working people of this country.

Mr. A. B. Patterson (Fraser Valley): Mr. Speaker, I propose to make my intervention in this debate as brief as possible. Of course, I hope hon. members will not become too optimistic, because brevity to one person might not be brevity to another. However, what I have to say will be in the way of emphasis rather than information because it appears to me that the situation has been covered thoroughly. Figures have been quoted, and even although there is a wide difference in those figures, it has been brought to our attention clearly that there is a serious problem existing with regard to our employment situation. Not only that, but we have been reminded that the number of our employed does not make too much difference; the difficulty lies in the fact that there are