

Unemployment

I would like to say to the hon. Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Gardiner) and to this house that there is another measure, supplementary to the former, which should be taken in this connection; it is the levying of an excise tax on the sale of margarine, with the evident purpose of protecting both the farmers and the working people. I have tried on several occasions in the past to demonstrate this theory. I do not want to labour it today and I shall merely repeat that the protection afforded agricultural producers constitutes, in my humble opinion, the best means of maintaining or restoring the purchasing power of a class of people who are very numerous in this country. In so doing, we shall, on the one hand, keep in the agricultural industry a number of persons who, otherwise, would migrate to cities and towns and increase the number of jobless and, on the other hand, we shall favour employment by increasing the use of consumer products.

(Text):

Mr. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): Mr. Speaker, I want to take a brief part in this debate because I believe this is one of the most important subjects the House of Commons will have to face during the present sittings. This debate has continued now for some five days, and it seems to me that the attitude of complacency which was taken in regard to this problem of unemployment has been dissipated only slightly. I recall that there was some reference to the problem in the speech from the throne; then we had an early statement in the house by the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) when he admitted there was unemployment, but that, as had been the case in previous years, with the advancing season this difficulty would tend to wither away. I believe it is necessary that every hon. member possible should take part in the discussion if we are to impress upon the government the importance of dealing in a forthright manner with this trouble spot in our economy.

There are many sides to the problem but I am going to concentrate on just one aspect, the difficulty faced by the unemployed employable. That is the term which is used to describe him these days but there was a time, particularly during the thirties, when he was referred to as a transient or migrant. This is the man who shifts from pillar to post in the country without having roots in any community or province. The only assistance available to such a person is that provided by voluntary welfare organizations. During the thirties this was a tremendous problem. At that time a large percentage of our young Canadians were members of

what was referred to as the forgotten generation. I suppose I can put myself in that category, because when I left high school in the mid-thirties there were no job opportunities available for my classmates or myself.

While the problem today is less severe so far as the number is concerned, it is still an extreme social tragedy for these young men, unmarried as well as married, who find themselves forced into the unemployed employables group. It is not a new problem. Perhaps it disappeared during the war and the immediate post-war years, but it is one problem which has faced Canada from the earliest period of our economic development. To a certain degree it includes seasonal workers, who have to possess great mobility in order to seek work that becomes available in various parts of Canada at various times of the year. As I say, it is not a new problem; therefore it is all the more surprising to me that some action has not been taken by the government during all these years to deal with it in a more direct way.

During the early part of the thirties the problem of the migrant or transient worker became really severe, and there was an attempt on the part of the government of that day to deal with it in a direct way by providing relief camps. Whenever we hear critics of that government make reference to those days we always hear reference made to the relief camps. They were done away with in 1935, and nothing was instituted to take their place.

Just before the war in 1938, and during the first year of the war in 1939, I had the privilege of having some dealings with some of these men who were pounding the highways and riding the freights from one end of the country to the other. They used to tell me that at least the late Mr. Bennett provided relief camps, but all that was being provided by Mr. King were the highways to pound on.

Coming directly to the problem that faces us today with reference to the unemployed employables, I should like to refer to a study made in 1939 designed to deal comprehensively with this difficulty. It became obvious during the latter part of the thirties, particularly in 1937, that something would have to be done at all levels of government to provide necessary welfare measures to meet this recurring problem. Preliminary discussions beginning in 1937 and carrying on through 1938 resulted in the calling of a conference in January, 1939, under the auspices of the Canadian Welfare Council.

Following the deliberations of that special committee on non-residents and migrants certain recommendations were embodied in