

Supply—Labour

coverage, universal coverage, territorial coverage, and at the moment we are studying what I consider to be a feasible plan, that is inclusion on a voluntary basis.

In other words, if a farmer finds himself unable to obtain employees to work on his farm but there are some available and the only reason they will not accept his employment is that he has not unemployment insurance coverage, then he may be able to be registered as an employer and to obtain that coverage. That might be the start of the inclusion of the farm employees. As I say, we are at the moment giving study to this matter. This study of the inclusion of farm help has been going on ever since I have taken office, I might say, but because of these difficulties and because of the change of mind by the industry itself, so to speak, there has not been brought about a more rapid solution.

Mr. Herridge: Would the minister mind commenting on the present ambiguity with respect to who is covered as farm labour?

Mr. Starr: Section 61 of the Unemployment Insurance Act has to do with the matter. It covers skilled tradesmen employed by farmers. The act applies only to skilled labour, tradesmen who are employed by farmers for a short period of time; I believe it is 60 days.

Mr. Herridge: What is a skilled tradesman? The minister must understand that nowadays a man turns up with a hammer and saw and says "I am a skilled tradesman". What is the definition of a skilled tradesman?

Mr. Starr: There is not a clear definition of that category. It is supposed to include carpenters and other people whom the farmer might hire to work on his farm doing repair work or in the construction of buildings and so on. There is no clear definition. That is one of the things that probably will be cleared up when we look into the possibility of including farm labour under this act.

Mr. Herridge: This matter is of a good deal of importance to the people in my district. Would a man who came on your premises to clear land and said, "I am a skilled logger and I take contracts to clear land on farms on occasion" be a skilled tradesman?

Mr. Starr: I doubt that very much. I would not think so.

Mr. Herridge: I should like the minister to tell that to the loggers in my district.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Before this item carries I want to make reference to one matter. There have been many issues between the Minister of Labour and myself and hon. members in the past few weeks

but I should like to thank the Minister of Labour for resolving a problem which was of great concern to a number of my constituents during this past year. Some of them had been called upon to pay fairly large sums of money back to the unemployment insurance commission. These constituents came to me and I decided that under the law these impositions had been exacted illegally. I took the matter up with the commission and they told me finally that they agreed with the decision I had taken but that they had no authority to return these monies to the individuals concerned. The commission also stated that it did not propose to demand payment of others who had not made the payment in accordance with the demands previously made on them by the commission. This matter was finally taken to the minister and he decided that as the impositions in the first instance were unjust it would be unfair to fail to return the monies to those who had already paid just as it would be unfair and illegal to demand payment of those who had not paid. I want the minister to know that notwithstanding the vigorous character of the issues between himself and those of us on this side of the chamber and in particular myself, I appreciate his resolving this problem which has meant so much to a considerable number of the men in the factories in Windsor whom I have the honour of representing in this house.

Mr. MacEwan: I have just a few remarks to make on this matter. It is a matter of which the minister has knowledge now but I believe it will bear repetition. I listened with interest to the remarks made by the hon. member for Kootenay West. Of course, I always enjoy them. Off the record, may I say this. He mentioned the fact that he did not speak to gain votes. I am sure that his winning ways and pleasant personality are responsible for doing that.

I wish to refer to a submission made to the Minister of Labour by the United Steel Workers of America, local 1231 of Trenton, Nova Scotia with regard to a certain part of the Unemployment Insurance Act. Many of the members of this union are employees of the Eastern Car Company which builds railway cars. As a result of this type of employment, it quite often happens that the employment is intermittent as orders come and go throughout the year. As to the payment of benefits under the act, as is known, under the act the average of the last 30 weeks is taken. In this case, the employees of this particular industry, who number close to 1,000, are at top production pay on the high rate by way of contributions but because the work is intermittent as I have said—that is, they are