

Proposed Committee on Unemployment

Symptoms of the problem are apparent in every province of Canada. Anyone who read the speeches delivered in the debate on the speech from the throne could not help being struck by the similarity of the stories told by members coming from different parts of Canada. We heard from the fishermen of Newfoundland and the fishermen of the maritime provinces both east and west, as well as the agriculturists in New Brunswick. We heard about the unemployment among the pulp workers and the textile workers in Quebec and Ontario, and the implement and machinery workers in Ontario. From implement machinery in Ontario to the vast surpluses of farm products that existed in western Canada the story was the same. The same problem existed in the coal and lumber industries. From coast to coast there were signs of serious trouble.

These were indications that should have been noted earlier by the government and I believe should have been referred to with more emphasis in the speech from the throne. The government itself made sort of casual references that there were soft spots appearing here and there, and that there were some dollar shortages that were causing some concern to Canadian exporters. It is only because we see that today Canada is heading into something very serious that we urge the government to take immediate action, something more immediate and more effective than they have presented so far.

These are symptoms of real trouble. Worst of all is the fact that we are having difficulties with trade. It was reported in the press the other day that in talking to a group of unemployed from the farm machinery and implement industry the Acting Prime Minister (Mr. Howe) reminded them of the fact that they had helped to price themselves out of the market, and that their demands for increased wages were one of the main contributing causes. He ended by suggesting to these men that he saw very little hope for them in that industry at the present time, and that they had better seek work elsewhere. I wonder whether it occurred to the minister at that time that the demand for higher wages comes about because people find it difficult to buy the things they need for a decent living; because there is difficulty in buying food and clothing and paying high rentals. I think the cost of living was the main contributing factor, and it was because of these costs that the workers demanded higher wages.

It would have been a good thing for Canada if there had not been an increase in the cost of production and in the cost of living. Then Canadian goods could have

[Mr. Castleden.]

gone into competition with those of other countries on the world markets. We in this party urged in this house five or six years ago that the line be held on the cost of living and that wages and prices be controlled so that Canadian commodities could continue to compete. Even the government will admit that the lifeblood of a nation is mainly its trade.

I was pleased this afternoon to hear the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Drew) talk about the seriousness of this situation and see his awareness of the problem, also his warning to the government that what they did prior to the last trouble in Canada, when unemployment appeared, would not be sufficient this time. The fact is that apparently the government was not aware at that time of the seriousness of the situation. I am not going to say that I think the Conservative party presented a much better solution to the problem, because I can remember that the government of this country was turned out of office largely because of the unemployment issue. The people returned the Conservative party to power because the leader of that party at that time told the Canadian people that he would blast his way into the markets of the world.

An hon. Member: And he tried.

Mr. Castleden: And they tried, but you do not blast your way into markets; you put your goods down in competition with the commodities of other countries.

We have a particularly big problem in Canada today because we cannot get our goods in a position where they will compete with the high cost of living in the country. Drastic measures will have to be taken. The Canadian people in large measure have given this government their confidence. We urge that the government take action today to prevent further economic distress. Half a million unemployed are in desperate circumstances though not yet as desperate as they were in the late 1920's and 1930's. Thank heavens we have almost a billion dollars in unemployment insurance funds. But in the storm that appears to be coming to Canada that amount will be wiped out in a very short period of time if unemployment increases. You cannot get markets back in a month or two.

In the matter of trade we have a serious problem. The Canadian government should recognize the basic rights of the Canadian people. Canadian people should not be unemployed so long as there is in this land a need for food, clothing and housing. The rights of people who know how to work, manufacture and develop the resources of this