

Proposed Committee on Unemployment

Mr. A. W. Stuart (Charlotte): Mr. Speaker, so far in this debate we have heard from all sides of the house an explanation of conditions which could be found today among those employed in industry. I think the story has been pretty well told.

But, as usual, those primary producers who must look out for themselves have so far been completely ignored. I fully realize that those employed in the textile industry and in many other industries of this country are most unhappy with the unemployment situation as it exists today. I have every sympathy for those people and I only hope that conditions will improve in the near future to a point where employment may be found to take care of the entire group.

I have discussed this problem with the government officials since I came to Ottawa. I have placed before them the position of those in my own county, and I am convinced they are making every effort to improve conditions in the textile and other industries which find the going a little tough at the present time.

The subject introduced by the hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra (Mr. Green) is, I believe, of great interest to every member in this chamber. Employment in Charlotte county comes from the textile industry, the woodworking industry, and to some extent the fish canning industry. The majority of the labourers affected would be employed in the three industries I have mentioned. I have every hope that conditions may improve in connection with all three. However, I have in mind at the present time a group in my county and on the Atlantic coast line who have faced several seasons which have not been too good. These men find themselves without financial assistance of any kind. The fishermen to whom I refer do not qualify for unemployment insurance benefits, and that is why I want to emphasize the conditions in this industry for just a few minutes.

Those who are employed at the present time in the textile and other industries, or who are employed part-time, have the benefit of unemployment insurance. The fishermen of whom I speak are paying indirectly into the federal fund which supports unemployment insurance with no hope of ever receiving any benefits. To me that is a situation that should be rectified. I feel that this particular group should receive the same benefits from unemployment insurance that others in Canada are receiving at the present time. I see no reason why they should be asked to make contributions without any hope of receiving any benefits.

It has been suggested by some who have spoken previously that these payments should be increased. Again I believe every member

in the house would have that same feeling. They would want it to be done if it were possible to do so. Unemployment insurance has been in effect for only 12 or 13 years, and I consider it one of the greatest protections the working people of this country could hope for. Of course the idea was initiated by a Liberal government and put into effect by a Liberal government. The benefits which the working people of this country are receiving today are, I believe, of great assistance, even in the present amounts.

I hope that the day will come when the primary producers of this country will be placed in the same category. When I refer to primary producers I mean that group who are self-employed, who must go out with their two hands to make a living for themselves. When the going is tough they just buckle in their belts a little tighter and continue to try to produce and sell. I feel that this group has been neglected, and I submit that it should be given some consideration. For that reason I suggest that some way must be found to include them with those who receive the benefits of unemployment insurance.

In the county of Charlotte which I have the honour to represent the time is rapidly approaching when these fishermen will be getting ready for spring fishing. There are types of fishing that are carried on the year round. There are hundreds of fishermen down there on the water trying to gain a livelihood. The necessary materials to repair the equipment needed in their fishing will have to be found within the next two or three months. In some cases it will be necessary to replace engines within that time if these men are to be able to carry on in 1954.

In so far as sardine fishing is concerned, the materials needed can be purchased during the winter months more cheaply than in the summer. Many of the men who would like to go back in the industry this year have not the necessary materials, and they have not the cash to buy those materials. Those who have always been most kind and considerate in furnishing credit have gone as far as they can. It has now reached the point where, if they are to continue, some sort of financial assistance must be provided.

I know these fishermen well because I have worked with them for over 20 years. They are not asking for a handout; they are not that type. They pay their bills when they can make the necessary money. They have had three or four poor seasons, and the reason I am particularly interested in them today is that it looks as though 1954 might be a good year in the fishing business. I say that for these reasons. We find today that the supplies of canned fish are practically depleted, and