

GOVERNMENT FAILED ON UNEMPLOYMENT

Winnipeg Clergymen Refer to Message of Deputation Which Premier Refused to See.

Local Parliament Did Nothing to Relieve Situation—Closing of Bars Another Question.

The message which the Social Service council made a vain effort on Friday to deliver to the provincial legislature as the subject of an address in St. Andrew's church last night by Rev. Dr. A. G. Sinclair, who declared that the delegation wanted to draw the attention of the government to the necessity of doing something to alleviate unemployment and to the still greater necessity of closing the bars in the province while the war lasted—emergency proceedings which the preacher described as about the most important the legislature could take.

Having laid down the principle that it was the duty of society in general to see that every man got an opportunity to earn a living, and shown that there was a great deal of unemployment in Winnipeg at the present time, Dr. Sinclair explicitly spoke of the arrangements which had been made by the Social Service council to state its case to the legislature. "We appealed to the premier of the province to be heard on the Friday," he said, "and as he had heard other deputations on the Thursday, we felt sure that our request would be granted. We, indeed, received a reply, a copy of which I have in my possession, signed by his private secretary, telling us that we would be gladly received on Friday morning at 10 o'clock. We made arrangements accordingly. We were at the parliament buildings at the time stated, a large and representative deputation, and suddenly we were informed that the engagement was off; that, without any explanation being given, we would not get an opportunity of presenting our case."

Dr. Sinclair said he was not going to make any criticism in a partisan spirit that evening of the premier's action, and he would simply say that as it was an emergency session of the legislature the deputation ought to have been given a chance of stating its views regarding two emergency matters, matters that as urgently required the attention of the legislature as anything that had come before it, and more important even than the passing of a moratorium. In the first place, the deputation wanted to bring before the legislature the great question of unemployment, because it was felt the question was going to be exceptionally acute this winter. The deputation wanted to emphasize the splendid and statesmanlike way in which the government of Great Britain had not only mobilized her army but had mobilized her industrial forces, had appealed to the employers of the country to recognize it as a patriotic duty to make every sacrifice to maintain the number of their employees, and not only that but to make every effort to keep up the rate of wages.

Great Britain's Action.

Everything had been done by Great Britain, said the speaker, to put the question of unemployment in the forefront, and not content with making an appeal on these lines to the private employers, Great Britain had shown them a splendid example by voting the immense sum of £100,000,000 for public work, including housing schemes, reclamation of land, and other improvements. The situation was the same in this province, and it called for the same kind of appeal from the provincial government to private employers of labor, and action by the government in respect of public works in proportion to the requirements of the province. What the delegation wanted to get emphasized was that the employer who was making sacrifices to maintain his staff and to keep up the rate of wages was just as patriotic as the man who was making big contributions to the Patriotic fund or even as the man who volunteered for service at the front; and that it was necessary for the government to set the private employers a good example by increasing its programme of public works instead of curtailing it. As an instance of what the government might do, Dr. Sinclair said it might break tracts that were lying idle and that perhaps were being simply held up by speculators.

Closing of Bar Rooms.

The preacher went on to state that the deputation intended also to ask the government, as an emergency measure, to close up the bar rooms in the province. That was not an uncommon thing to do at emergency times in other countries, and it was necessary in Manitoba, which could not afford the terrible waste of money and physical force, which the drink traffic involved. The delegates, indeed, felt that at a time when the empire was engaged in a life and death struggle it was a small thing to ask that the government should take steps to prevent this waste. There should be no waste at a time of emergency. The bar room produced nothing that was useful or good, and it was simply a parasite on the legitimate industry and resources of the province. However, it might be felt that the province could afford the waste in times of peace, all must feel that it could not afford it now, as every dollar spent in the bar lessened the purchasing power of a family and was a tax on the legitimate industry of the province.

Mistake of Premier's Staff.

In the course of a sermon on the same subject, Rev. Edgar Whitehouse, of St. James' Park Congregational church, said he understood that it was because of a mistake on the part of the premier's staff that the arrangement had been made for the deputation to wait upon the legislature on the Friday, and that, the mistake having occurred in such a way, it was incumbent on the premier, as a matter of courtesy, to arrange for the deputation being heard.

Mr. Whitehouse said one of the objects of the delegation was to ask the government either to curtail the sale of liquor in the bars or to prohibit the sale of it altogether during the war. The appeal was to pass a purely precautionary measure, in view of the economic situation, to endeavor to relieve the community of the unnecessary burden represented by business over the bar, and to attempt to divert monies so spent into channels of usefulness. He was afraid there would have been no disposition on the part of the parliament generally to close up the bars for purely economic reasons, especially at a time when they would be doing less business than usual, but the presentation of the economic case against drink at the present time in the local parliament would have been a splendid thing from a propaganda standpoint.

From the point of view of the economist, said Mr. Whitehouse, it would be a splendid thing to prohibit the sale of liquor in the province during the war, even if they had to pension those thereby thrown out of employment. More would be saved than would be spent. The lesson which people were learning now with reference to the economic menace of the drink traffic would bear fruit.

Only Relief Was Work.

Mr. Whitehouse, regarding the second matter that the council wanted to bring before the legislature, the necessity for providing as much public

work as possible, said it belonged to the realm of the obvious. The moratorium passed would be a relief and a protection to many, and would help some who were unemployed, but the only real relief of unemployment was work. To recommence public work simply solved that amount of unemployment which had been created by shutting it down. The right policy was to make people able to pay rather than to relieve them of the responsibility of paying. He drew attention to what had been done in the old country, emphasizing the fact that the imperial parliament had gone out of its way to vote £20,000,000 for the prosecution of housing schemes alone.

"We have to face the fact," declared Mr. Whitehouse, "that the local parliament has met and failed to do anything to relieve the situation with reference to unemployment. This is a serious matter, and in view of the coming winter the consequences are bound to be serious. The church cannot solve this problem. She has neither the means nor the machinery, and it is not her duty to solve it. People have the right, however, to expect from public men that they will make this matter their concern, and that they will find a way to meet the situation effectually and efficiently."