

Release of 200,000 Men From War Industry Seen Farm Labor Solution

W. L. Houck Says Idea of Change-Over Is to Make Labor Pool Available

The release of between 200,000 and 300,000 war workers for jobs on farms, as a result of the Dominion Government's decision to extend the shipbuilding program, would go a long way toward solving the farm labor shortage, W. L. Houck, vice-chairman of the Ontario Hydro Commission, told the Legislature yesterday. He declared that a famine faced Canada unless the farmers were given sufficient help.

"Help is badly needed, as we all know," said Mr. Houck, during a discussion of agricultural problems. "I am sure the idea behind the change-over from manufacture of tanks and guns to convoy ships is to provide a labor pool for the farms."

Emphasis on Ships.

Opposition Leader George Drew said there was no doubt the Dominion intended to release men from war industries by a change in war production plans which would place greater emphasis on the shipbuilding program. Fewer men were needed to process steel for ships than for tanks and guns, he said, and this would result in between 200,000 to 300,000 workers being dropped from the war factories. With Ontario farmers in desperate need of help if they are to maintain the stepped-up food production plan "there is grave need for immediate implementation of the plan to divert these workers into agriculture."

The discussion in the House developed from a plea made by Col. T. L. Kennedy (Prog. Con., Peel), for a week's session of the Legislature to consider the plight of the farmers. In supporting his colleague, Col. Drew said it was of the utmost importance that every effort be made to put the plan into effect now, and not three months from now.

And he warned: "If this is allowed to drift—and I'm not convinced that many things aren't drifting under the control of Ottawa—it may be too late. Something should be done in time so that the farmers may know what to expect this summer. The plan should be implemented immediately."

The whole matter was "of vital concern," said Col. Drew, tied in as it was with the Hydro power situation. "I don't think the projected change in production is to make men available, but that will be the result. The purpose, as set forth in the press, is that Canada shall concentrate on freighters and convoy ships and defeat the bottle-neck created by scarcity of convoy vessels.

"There is to be a 'cooling off' in production of some military weapons and vehicles using steel, as there is just so much steel available and we have to depend upon the United States for much of it," he said. It was obvious, he added, that the Hydro vice-chairman, having earlier mentioned 200,000 to 300,000 as likely to be affected, was acquainted with the estimated number to be released from war industry.

Hepburn Expresses Concern.

Provincial Treasurer M. F. Hepburn expressed the Government's concern over the increasing gravity of the farm situation. It was the first time in the memory of urban dwellers, he said, that money would not buy butter and beef that could be so readily produced in this country. "The problem of marketing," he pointed out, "no longer exists—it's the problem of supplying the market now.

"I don't want to be overly critical of Ottawa," Mr. Hepburn continued, "but I don't think the farmer has been treated fairly. It seems to me the policy has been to drive him to the lowest rung on the economic ladder. Through discouragement, farmers are liquidating their live stock. Yet years ago Churchill warned us that food, at the end of the war, will be his strongest weapon. We've paid a \$7,000,000 subsidy on cheese and bacon in an effort to help and it's probably one of the best investments this Province ever made, as at that time an even greater liquidation of breeding stock had begun than now.

"We are drifting, and drifting badly. From reports this year will see a sharp falling off in farm production at a time when shipping losses are heavy and ships are carry-

ing down with them food and other necessities for the Allies."

Asking the Government to devote a week to discussion of the present problems of Ontario farmers and the condition of the Province's farms, Col. Kennedy pointed out as one of the chief bases of farmers' economic difficulties the increasing share of the consumer's dollar going to processors and other middlemen.

As an example of the increased "spread" in recent years, and the falling return to farmers, he quoted figures for 69 Canadian cities on division of the sale price of a 200-pound hog on May 17, 1917, during the last war, as compared with May 20, 1942, in the midst of this conflict.

In 1917, he said, a 200-pound hog sold for \$55.95, of which the cost of processing, selling, etc., was \$19.50. The farmer who produced the hog received \$34.80. In 1942 the sale price had advanced to \$58.50, the middleman got \$35.50, and the farmer only \$23.

This meant, he said, that the consumer was paying 4.2 per cent more, the farmer got 33.9 per cent less, and the processor's and seller's share increased by 85.4 per cent.

"I think we should correct that," he said. "The luxury of dressing, selling and delivering is all out of proportion. The farmer should get more of the consumer's dollar." He thought the Government should consent to spending a week in seeking a remedy.

Col. Kennedy declared 1942 was the worst year in his memory for farmers, with more and more of the consumer's dollar going to somebody else.

Plea for More Power.

H. E. Welsh (Prog. Con., Hastings East) added a plea for more electric power for the farms of Ontario, since they were expected to make tremendous increases in production to meet war needs.

Insufficient power or insufficient materials to extend Hydro service to more farms was not a sufficient answer, he felt.

Mr. Houck agreed, but insisted the Hydro was not standing in the way. The farmer was "up against it." It was amazing, he said, that Hydro in the past year had erected only 71 miles of line serving about 4,000 customers' homes (mostly war workers) in rural sections. Much of the blame lay with metal controls and not all on the power controller, he held. Each application for power had been presented and in most cases were turned down by the power or metals controller.

"Freezing" of electrical equipment for extension of power lines and services was scored by Mr. Welsh.

Since Ottawa had named a power body over the Ontario body, "we're entirely in the hands of Ottawa," said Mr. Houck.

Agricultural Minister P.M. Dewan, replying to Col. Kennedy's request for a week's Legislature discussion on farm problems, revealed that a survey has been made to determine whether Ontario farmers can maintain or increase production in face of the manpower shortage. The data was now being compiled, he said, and he promised to bring it before the House when it reconvenes.

While agreeing with Col. Kennedy's views, Mr. Dewan said he did not think there would be anything gained by devoting a week's session to agricultural problems at this time.