

*Unemployment Insurance*

country. The minister of labour of that day, speaking in the house, asserted on June 17, 1940, as reported at page 824 of *Hansard*:

After all, it is a vital problem.

The "it" refers to unemployment.

It is a problem which has baffled us.

I want to underline the word "baffled" because I propose to come back to it.

It is one for which every member of this committee, certainly including myself, would like, if possible, to find a panacea, a solution, a cure-all.

That statement was made in reply to a question which had been asked by the hon. member for Macleod (Mr. Hansell). The minister then went on to point out, as reported at page 825:

May I add that I am not putting these figures on *Hansard* with any great pride of achievement; they are too large; I am first to recognize and realize that, and I state it quite frankly.

These are the revised figures. The total number in receipt of material aid in some form or another in March—

Remember, that was 1940.

—was 772,542. I know it is no answer to say that this figure is 25 per cent less than that for the same month last year. The question is why there should be any at all.

It appears that 80.4 per cent of the heads of families unemployed at that time were reported by the minister as being employable persons. It has been said in the house already this session that anyone bringing the question of unemployment before the house, especially if he does it forcefully, will be accused of being a gloomster or a pessimist. I would say no, we are not gloomsters. The gloom has already been spread; all we are endeavouring to do is to pierce a hole through it so a little light may come in to give some comfort and encouragement to those thousands who are now without employment.

Every time I turn over in my mind this figure of 375,000 registered persons, I am shocked. I agree firmly with the previous speaker that it undoubtedly falls far short of the actual number of unemployed persons in Canada today. Yet such a condition of unemployment is described as temporary, regional, spotty, pockets and the like. It seems to me those words are used in order to lull the people of Canada into a false sense of security, so far as this acute and growing problem is concerned. It would appear that the government of Canada has now come to the view that all it has to do is say to the people of Canada, "All is well" and all must be well. We heard a lot of that from the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Gardiner) last spring, and what an eye-opener we got a little later on!

In his observations in the house the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) did an extremely neat job of beclouding the issue, if I may use that term. As far as the unemployed are concerned, this problem is upon us now. It is serious and it is slight comfort to them to try to secure any consolation from the assertion that unemployment is spotty or regional, that it is only in pockets or temporary.

A moment ago I referred to those who accuse us of being spreaders of gloom, who tell us that we should be optimistic, that we should endeavour to paint these things in the most glowing colours possible. Those admonitions came from the government itself. As a result I went back to 1935 to find out if the Liberals at that time could possibly have been spreaders of gloom and I found a most interesting broadcast on this subject that had been made by the former prime minister, the Right Hon. Mr. King. Here are a few of the phrases that I picked out of just one broadcast: Terrifying problem, cruel privations, physical suffering, a condition of despair, an appalling situation, menacing shadows, terror stalks the land, a prevailing and hazardous situation, privation and suffering, human anguish, mental anxiety. Those were all in one broadcast and I dare say I missed more than I got. That was an impassioned appeal. I agree that there was much terror in the land. I agree that there was much anguish and that there was a great deal of privation and suffering. There was no question about it. But were I to coin those same phrases today I would be accused immediately of being a pessimist, of being unrealistic in my outlook, of being a spreader of gloom. In fact I would be accused of exaggerating the condition.

Let me point out that the conditions were not entirely parallel. By 1935 we had passed through a number of years of depression and unemployment. However, who can stand on the floor of this house today and say that five years hence we will be able to say that we have not passed through a similar five-year period? The record of the Liberal party is none too good between 1935 and the outbreak of war, and I shall refer to a few figures covering those years. Then following that I am going to give several quotations from that broadcast because, as far as the appeal which the Liberals made to the people in 1935 was concerned, there was no question about their ability to meet and solve this problem. In fact they even named several things which they could and would do. I want to emphasize that we were never out of the depression until the outbreak of war in 1939.

When the former prime minister made that broadcast and used that collection of choice phrases he estimated the unemployed in