

Proposed Committee on Unemployment

Mr. Drew: We certainly heard the interjection from one of the front row seats or close to the front row seats, giving the figure of 528,000. If that is not correct, then all the more reason we should have this inquiry to find out what the figure is. At any rate, apart from the argument as to who made the statement, the fact remains that the Minister of Labour has told us there are over 500,000 applications.

Unfortunately we have found we cannot rely entirely on all the statements that are made. For that reason the examination by a committee would be highly desirable. We find, for instance, that in this debate on February 15 the Acting Prime Minister (Mr. Howe) said, at page 2105 of *Hansard* for that day:

The next important factor is the prospect for exports. There again I believe we can look for another good year. The final figures for 1953 show a decrease of 3 per cent in value of exports but, as a matter of fact, in volume the last year was a record year for exports, being even greater than 1952.

Just a few days ago we received the annual report of the Bank of Canada, and page 15 shows the figure for both price and volume was down not 3 per cent but 2 per cent to 98. The Minister of Trade and Commerce could have turned to another statistical report prepared by his own department. We find in a report of the dominion bureau of statistics dated February 5 the statement that lower average prices and reduced volume both contributed to the decline in value of 1953 exports.

I point out that the Acting Prime Minister naturally might make a mistake of that kind. It does not substantially affect some parts of his argument, but since we find this inconsistency between his statements and those of the Bank of Canada and the dominion bureau of statistics, it does indicate why there should be an inquiry under the ordinary parliamentary practices to ascertain what the facts actually are.

One of the difficulties with which we are all confronted is the similarity of the appeals that are now being made not to discuss these facts because they might disturb the public mind. The fact is that the government supporters do not want to have the facts really disclosed to the public. We want the facts out in the open. I submit, Mr. Speaker, it is the duty of members to get those facts before them, and not try to brush off this situation or dispose of it in any way. Will the Minister of Labour tell us that unemployment is unreal in Fredericton today? Will the Minister of Labour go to Fredericton and tell the people who no longer have employment in the textile

[Mr. Abbott.]

plants that they had better move to places other than Fredericton to get work? That is the answer the textile workers have received when this question has been brought up.

We do not ask that anyone jump to any conclusions. We simply ask that a well-established procedure be followed to obtain the facts. What we are concerned about is the state of mind represented by the speech made here this afternoon by the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Trade and Commerce (Mr. Dickey). Everything in the garden is lovely, according to him. Apparently people who are out of employment are only imagining it. Apparently the difficulties some industries are now encountering are really nothing but a passing inconvenience. Apparently the impact of surpluses of wheat and other foodstuffs is really not something that should be talked about, except of course when the Acting Prime Minister goes to Winnipeg. It is improper for anyone else to talk about it, because somebody might get concerned. That was the attitude of the Liberal government that was in power when economic disaster hit this country.

As a matter of interest, because it illustrates so clearly that state of mind we do not wish to see perpetuated, may I read a few words from the speech from the throne delivered on February 20, 1930, while a Liberal government was in power. These were the words spoken by the governor general of that day; and remember, this was after the economic storm had broken. This was after that great depression, as we have heard it described, had actually begun, and during the time a Liberal government was in power. Let me read those words of the governor general on February 20, 1930. This is what he said:

It affords me much pleasure to greet you at the commencement of another session of parliament, and to be able to congratulate you upon the continued prosperity of the country. The year 1929 was the most productive year in the history of Canada. In industries, other than agriculture, employment reached the highest point on record; new construction was the largest known. Mining production was of unequalled value. Manufacturing production surpassed all previous records. There was vast increase in the development of hydro-electric power. The products of our fields and our herds reached higher standards of excellence and quality than at any previous time. The dominion is already recovering from the seasonal slackness evident at the end of the year, and it is not to be forgotten that the bulk of the 1929 wheat crop still remains in Canadian hands for final disposition.

Now, Mr. Speaker, these words are not taken from any recent speech; these were words prepared by the Liberal government of that day, to be read by the governor general.

Mr. Rowe: They must have copied it this year.