

Proposed Committee on Unemployment

this country which is causing a great deal of concern in the minds of many of our people, no matter what the attitude of members of the government and its supporters may be. One of the very disturbing aspects of the kind of statement made by the hon. member for Temiscouata is the extent to which it demonstrated an hon. member may be prepared to go to divert attention from the real subject that is before us for consideration. Only this morning I heard a report over the radio from a station in the United States as to the great concern that is now felt there as a result of the fact that more than 3 million people are unemployed. They regard that as a serious situation. I must say there is no evidence that their government is brushing the matter aside and trying to dismiss it as something that does not exist.

On the contrary, the president of the United States appointed a commission to inquire into the situation and to make recommendations both for a short-term and long-term solution of these difficulties as well as to recommend any immediate steps that should be taken. It was not suggested there that this was a means of shelving the issue. The commission was welcomed as evidence of the fact that they were really tackling the problem, and already certain recommendations have been made. I would point out, however, that on a proportionate basis 3 million unemployed in the United States would mean less than 300,000 here. From the earlier figures of the Department of Labour we already know that our figures of unemployment are much higher than that, so that even on the last figures presented to us by the government unemployment in Canada is substantially higher proportionately than in the United States. If there is cause for concern in the United States, there is still greater cause for concern here.

Mr. Dickey: Would the hon. member permit a question? Is he aware that the figure given in the house as the number of unemployed in Canada at the present time is 280,000?

Mr. Drew: I am well aware that during the course of this debate members of the house for the first time heard a figure of 524,000.

Mr. Pickersgill: Not unemployed.

Mr. Drew: Members of the house were told that there were 524,000 applications with the government agencies.

Mr. Rowe: There are 528,000 now. They have gone up by 4,000.

Mr. Drew: If it is 528,000, that is accepting the upward correction, this government needs to correct itself every day. Apparently there has been an increase in the last few days. We are indebted to the Secretary of State (Mr. Pickersgill) for the information. The figure is now 528,000, according to the Secretary of State.

It is not sufficient, Mr. Speaker, to make a general statement such as the Minister of Labour (Mr. Gregg) has made, to suggest that the figure really does not represent unemployed. The minister knows quite well that there are many unemployed whose names are not included in the 528,000. The minister is well aware that some of those people who until recently were working in the textile mills in his constituency probably will not be found on the list at the employment agency in Fredericton. The reason for that is obvious. Many people, when they become unemployed, start out on their own to seek employment in a way that people in this country can do. No; if we had no reason for asking for an inquiry that would give us the facts, it has been furnished to us by the production of these figures during the course of this debate.

These are not the only figures which cannot be lightly dismissed. They serve to confirm in substantial measure the figures given by representatives of the Trades and Labour Congress and the Canadian Congress of Labour in Ottawa last week. Our position is one which should be acceptable to the government. We say to the government, and to the supporters of the government, your figures are at variance with those presented by the representatives of the two largest groups of organized labour in Canada. We want to know what the facts are. While the debate on this motion is under way the Minister of Labour confirms the fact that we have a great deal of information to obtain, because he tells us that the figure is in excess of 500,000. This afternoon the Secretary of State told us the figure was 528,000.

Mr. Pickersgill: On a question of privilege, Mr. Speaker, I made no such statement whatever.

Mr. Drew: That voice, Mr. Speaker, had a strange similarity to the voice which so often interjects remarks delivered by a man who does not yet seem to realize that he is down on the floor of the house and not in the gallery.

Mr. Abbott: Toujours la politique.