

Supply—Finance

the committee on the orders of the day when the committee would be convened so that his motion could be dealt with.

We have asked the Minister of Labour repeatedly during this session whether he had been advised by the members of the interdepartmental committee if they had completed their report. It is interesting to note that the Department of Labour is represented on that committee. When the estimates of the Minister of Labour were under discussion in the house a few days ago the minister told us that as far as he knew the report was not yet ready; in any event, it had not yet come into his hands, but when he was encouraged to take the initiative and inquire whether it was ready he promised to look into the matter.

Since that time the Leader of the Opposition has put two questions on two separate days to the Minister of Labour asking him if the report was yet available so that the house might be given an opportunity to examine its contents and decide whether the recommendations, if they did suggest a change, should be accepted. At no time was the Minister of Labour able to say if the report had been prepared, whether it was ready or whether the government had enough time to give consideration to it.

However, a few days ago, I think on Monday last, the Minister of Labour did say in answer to a question that was put that the report was now ready but that the government had not yet considered it. Again, on a later day a question was put to the Minister of Labour to find out whether the government had yet considered the report. We were told that the government had not yet considered it.

I fully understand the Prime Minister when he says that he has been busy since the report was prepared and has not had an opportunity to examine its contents and consider its recommendations. It is perfectly understandable that he and his colleagues have not had time to do so. However, the house is now about to prorogue and while we may be meeting in the fall, as the Prime Minister has suggested, it is possible we will not be meeting until January. That will mean that an interval of at least five months will take place unless parliament comes back in the fall. During that time we may or may not have heavy unemployment.

This undoubtedly is the most important single domestic issue in Canada at the present time. It is a matter about which there is strong feeling and about which there is great public interest. If we are to have a new

standard of measurement devised by the government without having that standard submitted to parliament for consideration it could be that the government by giving effect to the recommendations would be able to create a situation whereby we would not get the kind of picture of unemployment we have been getting and which I feel is essential in the interests of objective discussion of this problem.

The Prime Minister himself has given confirmation of the validity of the national employment service figure because that is the figure which he himself referred to last Saturday afternoon when we were discussing some aspects of a related matter. It may be that this is not a matter that normally would be considered by the executive except in the unusual circumstances of the present situation. I am not trying to suggest that this is not a matter that the cabinet should consider but there are many standards adopted by the bureau of statistics in its assessment of statistical situations in our country that are not considered by the cabinet as a condition precedent to particular methods of assessment being adopted. I say that in the face of the controversy which exists regarding this problem and in the light of the fact we have had these three standards of measurements in this country for over 15 years it would be a serious departure from our traditional practices for the government, now that the report is ready in the dying days of the session, to deny parliament the opportunity of knowing what is in it and then, while parliament is not in session, to adopt a new standard that might not reflect the state of unemployment in Canada not in accordance with those standards that have prevailed since the end of the war and even during the war.

In the face of the fact that parliament has been seized with this matter I would urge the Prime Minister to consider carefully whether it would be in keeping with our parliamentary traditions to permit a change in the standard of measurement to take place without giving the industrial relations committee, which has a motion before it, and without giving parliament the opportunity in the light of current discussions of determining whether the recommendations, if they suggest change, should be adopted.

This is not a parallel situation, as the Leader of the Opposition mentioned, with the changes made a few years ago in the cost of living index. That was not at any time a matter before parliament in the sense that this situation is.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Oh, yes, it was; there was a committee set up.

[Mr. Martin (Essex East).]