

Supply—Labour

unemployment insurance commission. However, I want to draw the attention of the committee to the reply I received from the Prime Minister on October 28, in which he said:

I wish to acknowledge your letter of October 21st concerning the situation among the cod fishermen on the northeast coast of Newfoundland.

I assure you that the matter is being looked into thoroughly by my colleagues the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Fisheries, to whom I have forwarded copies of your letter.

As hon. members know, the Prime Minister was absent from the country from that time on until about Christmas. On December 1, when the fishermen who had enough stamps would have qualified for unemployment insurance, I wrote again to the Minister of Labour, from whom I have had nothing but a bare acknowledgement up to this time, to ask him what had happened to this commitment of the Prime Minister that this matter was going to be considered by his colleagues. This matter was, I might say, of real urgency to a class of persons who were promised by the Prime Minister about a year ago—and I have in my hand a complete report of a speech which the Prime Minister made at Charlottetown on this very subject—that no one would suffer. I wrote to the Minister of Labour on December 1 as follows:

On October 28, the Prime Minister acknowledged the letter I wrote to him on October 21, about the inability of the fishermen in Newfoundland to qualify for unemployment insurance because of the failure this year of the cod fishery. Mr. Diefenbaker assured me that the matter was being looked into thoroughly by his colleagues, the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Fisheries.

December 1, as you are aware, is the first day on which seasonal benefits can be paid under the unemployment insurance law and I am sure most of the fishermen who, through no fault of their own, cannot qualify for seasonal benefits will be greatly disappointed that no decision has yet been announced by the government about the suggestion for emergency "crop failure" benefits I made in my letter.

I am sure you realize, as I know the Minister of Fisheries who has been in Newfoundland does, that the need is urgent and that many fishermen have already been obliged to accept relief.

The method of meeting the problem suggested in my letter would be simple to administer and fair to the fishermen, but if the method is not acceptable to the government, I strongly urge that action be taken in some other way to meet this pressing need.

The government has seen fit to make \$200 available to every grain farmer whether he needs it or not. There can be no question of the need of the fishermen and one way to meet their problem would be a straight payment across the board to them as is being made to the farmers.

Whatever the method, there is urgent need for action now to prevent actual suffering—

That is the suffering the Prime Minister promised us would not exist while he was Prime Minister; and he promised it right

[Mr. Pickersgill.]

across this country only a year ago when he was seeking the support of the people.

—and I appeal to the government to act without delay.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Acting Prime Minister and to the Minister of Fisheries.

Of course both ministers were extremely polite in acknowledging my letter. I appreciate their courtesy and I thank them for it. But apparently that is all that happened, because on the second day of the session, as reported at page 16 of *Hansard* for January 16, 1959 I asked the Prime Minister this question:

I should like to ask the Prime Minister whether the government is going to take any action to relieve the distress caused by the failure of the cod fishery in Newfoundland, about which he will recall I wrote him last October, and which he advised me the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Fisheries were looking into urgently?

I stress the word "urgently", Mr. Speaker. This is a fair sample of what the present government understands by that word "urgently". The Prime Minister replied:

Mr. Speaker, the answer is still applicable.

Then I added:

I wonder if I might ask a supplementary question. Does the Prime Minister realize that half the fishermen on the northeast coast of Newfoundland have been forced on relief because of the failure of the government to act?

The Prime Minister, with his usual courtesy, gave no reply to that question. Then on January 20, as reported at page 77 of *Hansard*, I asked the Minister of Labour a question supplementary to questions that were asked by several other hon. members, including the Leader of the Opposition and the hon. member for Essex East, with regard to labour conditions and to which I think the answers were uniformly unsatisfactory. I asked this question:

May I ask a supplementary question. Is it not true that fishermen are not included this year—

That was in the figures the minister was giving.

—and is the minister's answer that no consideration is being given to a reduction in the number of stamps required also applicable to fishermen; because the minister will recall that he told me the opposite quite recently.

The minister told me in his letter that the matter was under consideration, and he then came into the house and in an offhand way said it was not being considered at all.

Mr. Starr: In the first part of his question the hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate is again confused.

I was not confused, sir; I knew perfectly well what I was asking. I think it was the minister who was somewhat confused, because he was referring to the national