

Unemployment Continuance Act

government in the administration of this act, other than to make the constitutional argument which he brought forward and which I think has been characterized by hon. gentlemen opposite as a very cherished doctrine of the Liberal party.

Mr. RALSTON: If my hon. friend will permit me—I am not going over my speech—but I did point out two things which perhaps escaped his attention. One was that only three days' work out of every month had been provided for those whom it was supposed the act was to benefit; and the other was that \$146,000,000 had been spent and at the most only \$44,000,000 worth of employment provided.

Mr. STEVENS: I did not intend, and I do not wish to be drawn into an analysis of that part of my hon. friend's speech.

Some hon. MEMBERS: Oh, oh.

Mr. STEVENS: I will dispose of it, however, in two or three sentences. In the first place, my hon. friend has placed upon Hansard and upon the front pages of the newspapers that there was \$146,000,000 spent, in which was included the amount spent by this government and the amounts spent by the provincial and municipal authorities, plus a very large sum of money spent in the normal way by the railways at the instigation of the provinces and the dominion to help the situation. He lumped all of those sums into one composite sum of \$146,000,000.

Mr. RALSTON: No, I divided it.

Mr. STEVENS: Then he divided it by a rather astute method of mathematics into the number of work days supplied, and indicated that the results were not very satisfactory. But in all fairness he and others must recognize this, that we do not say that we gave three hundred thousand odd individuals work during the whole of last year. That was not the object of the legislation at all. The object of the legislation was to give relief where it was needed. Undoubtedly some individuals secured relief for a few days or weeks at odd times, and at other times were able to look after themselves. For instance, in the city of Toronto, as well as in other cities—I am using Toronto as an illustration—during this current winter and the winter of a year ago what is known as the man-a-block scheme was inaugurated whereby residents, local citizens, would undertake to care for the needs of a family in a particular block. Thereby many individuals who received temporary relief under this act were taken out from

[Mr. Stevens.]

under the requirements of the act and given relief in other ways.

The hon. member for Quebec East (Mr. Lapointe) charged in a very unctuous manner that the Prime Minister was a despot and a dictator, and those observations have been echoed by others who have spoken on this subject. I pause to say only a word or two in that connection. There is no man in this country more jealous of the constitutional rights of its citizens, or of parliament, than is the Prime Minister of Canada. However, any and all government leaders must secure from parliament powers which perhaps at times may have the nature of dictatorship, if one chooses to use that term. I call the house to witness this, that the Prime Minister came to parliament, made his proposals and was clothed by it with certain powers. The only question which remains for parliament is not whether the action of a year ago was right or wrong but rather: What has the government done with the powers with which it was clothed? In so far as there has been any challenge of the action of the government, such criticism is perfectly legitimate. We are prepared to meet it, and prepared to listen to such criticism.

The situation which confronted the government was this: Undoubtedly there was a national emergency, the nature of which a year ago it was impossible to define in precise terms. Indeed, in any such emergency there are bound to be conditions which cannot possibly be foreseen, and yet it is of prime importance that such conditions should be met when they arise. Therefore, I say a year ago the government was faced with a national emergency due largely to two causes, namely unemployment and crop failure. So far as unemployment is concerned, we simply came to the support of the provinces. It has been reiterated time and time again that the duty of looking after civic welfare of the citizens of this country rests primarily upon the municipalities and provinces. Recognizing however that conditions were most unusual the federal government came to parliament and said, "We believe it is necessary for us to supplement the actions of the provinces and municipalities, and we are asking parliament to clothe us with power so to do." We received that power, and have carried out our obligations as made under agreements with the provinces. The result of our actions was laid upon the table a few days ago as contained in the report by the Minister of Labour.

The second difficulty with which we had to deal was the crop failure in the west. After