

Inquiries of the Ministry

possible to obtain information concerning what the situation is, and the situation is undoubtedly serious. I would also point out that this week the house is going to adjourn until April 6, at which time we will be approaching the period when seasonal benefits under the unemployment insurance provision will be running out. Because of the continuing unemployment problem many will be unable to obtain unemployment insurance benefits. In view of this fact I submit it is only a logical conclusion to everyone that this is a matter of urgency that should be discussed.

Mr. Speaker: As hon. members appreciate, it is not my function to say whether or not this is an urgent, important or critical matter. I do not for one moment take the position that it is not, but I do find that we have discussed this very problem throughout the session. In addition to the discussions which have been mentioned by the Minister of Public Works the hon. member who moved this motion moved an amendment on February 9 calling for a federal-provincial conference to discuss unemployment and fiscal relations.

In the absence of some marked change that has been sudden and which presents another problem from that which we have considered, it appears to me I could not allow the ordinary procedure of this house to be interrupted, which is what the hon. member is asking to do.

UNEMPLOYMENT—REQUEST FOR
LATEST STATISTICS

On the orders of the day:

Mr. A. D. Hales (Wellington South): Mr. Speaker, I should like to address a question to the Minister of Labour. Has he any up to date figures on the unemployment situation as it exists in Canada?

Hon. Michael Starr (Minister of Labour): Yes, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to inform the house that the latest joint release of the dominion bureau of statistics and the Department of Labour shows a general improvement in the labour situation across Canada. The February figure for persons without jobs and seeking work shows a drop of 1,000 from January. Since it comes at this time of the year, Mr. Speaker, it is encouraging evidence of a trend which has been developing for some weeks. The February figure of 537,000 job seekers represents 26,000 fewer looking for work than at this time last year. At the same time, 152,000 more persons are working. In view of the dire predictions that have been made in some quarters may I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that this government can take immense pride—

[Mr. Winch.]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Starr: I have some very important figures—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before he finishes, perhaps the minister would let me advise him that I have not permitted a debate on this subject. I hope he will keep within the ruling.

Mr. Starr: I do not think these figures are debatable, sir. I think all of us in the house can take great pride in the fact that 152,000 more persons are working this year than at this time last year.

In percentages of those seeking work, the figure is 8.8 per cent of the labour force as at mid-February. In January it was 8.9 per cent. Last February the seeking-work figure was 9.4 per cent of the labour force. It is on its way down. By comparing the picture in February we find that it is much more encouraging than it was even in the month of January. In January, unemployment was still up 98,000 over December and 11,000 over a year earlier. Employment was 142,000 lower than in December. This, I am very happy to say, Mr. Speaker, has been checked and reversed. Unemployment is down and employment is up very substantially.

When we turn to last year we find that for February, unemployment had jumped up 232,000 over the previous year. We find that it had jumped by 35,000 over the previous month, and it was at this time, Mr. Speaker, that the predictions that I referred to were made. However, the situation is now that we had 9,000 more people at work in February than in January and 152,000 more than in February last year, with a labour force 126,000 greater.

The national unemployment registrations were, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: I find that if not a specific debate at least a general debate is arising. I leave it to hon. members whether the minister should continue his answer at this length, and I would ask him to terminate it—

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I think it would be the wish of the house to allow the minister to complete his statement on the understanding, of course, that we on this side will have the same right and opportunity that we hope now arises, in view of the fact that the minister has already made a fairly comprehensive statement.

Mr. Speaker: The minister has not asked for leave to revert to motions to make such a statement. If he does, I will ask the house whether it wishes to give him the opportunity.