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The Leader of the Opposition

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Speeches From Throne.

If you wish to know on what authority I base these statements, I refer you to the speeches from the throne with which the Governor General has opened and closed the several sessions of Parliament. There is hardly one of them in which His Excellency has not been made to say that conditions were improving, that unemployment was diminishing, and that prosperity was returning. All the while, the facts pointed to the exact contrary.

The government's failure to view the problem in its proper perspective, or to recognize the magnitude of the task before it, is also demonstrated by the many false steps it has taken from the outset, and the absence of any consistent and constructive policy. Its only policy has been one of makeshift and temporary alleviation. It has changed from session to session, and from season to season.

Unemployment Figures.

In introducing his measures "to end unemployment" at the special session of 1930, Mr. Bennett himself estimated that, at that time, there were 117,000 unemployed. This, it is reasonable to assume, was an outside estimate. It was intended to disclose the magnitude of the problem. At the time of the census of 1931, the Dominion Bureau of Statistics reported that there were 393,000 wage earners out of work. In the absence of official figures, I gave, in the House of Commons in January, 1934, as a very conservative estimate of unemployed, the round figure of half a million. This

estimate was not corrected or contradicted by the government. Taking the latest figures on employment supplied by the Bureau of Statistics, it can be shown that, on the most conservative basis, there are today over 400,000 wage earners out of work. If we go by the estimates of social workers, labor organizations and labor leaders, we shall not be far out if we place the number of unemployed at approximately half a million. To avoid the possibility of any exaggeration, I shall leave the total at over 400,000. It is at least within the mark to say that the number of unemployed in Canada is four times what it was when the Bennett government assumed office.

1,272,000 on Relief.

I have been speaking only of the unemployed. I have said nothing of the numbers on relief. You must be careful to distinguish between the two. Fortunately, it does not follow that, because men and women are unemployed, they go automatically upon relief. Similarly, it must not be supposed that, because men and women are employed for a part of the time, sooner or later, they may not find it necessary to accept relief for themselves and for those dependent upon them for support. Figures on direct relief are available from May, 1932, to May of this year. These figures, which include dependents and those receiving partial and part-time relief, reveal a startling increase, from year to year, of persons who have been compelled to receive state assistance. In May, 1932, there were 597,000 who, in this manner, received direct relief. In May of this year there were 1,272,000.

The statistics I have given reveal something of the extent of Mr. Bennett's failure to redeem his promises to end unemployment and to abolish the dole. They are, however, far from revealing the true picture. It is not with statistics, but with human lives, that we are concerned. You cannot measure fear, privation and want by any yardstick or adding machine. Who will venture to estimate what the enforced idleness of hundreds of thousands of human beings, and the enforced acceptance of relief from the state by a very much larger number, over a period of two, three, four and, for some, five years, has meant in the way of physical suffering, of mental anxiety, and of human anguish to lives and homes of which there is no record whatever? Who will venture to estimate what the effect of all this may be upon the health and morale of the nation? Is it any wonder that today there is widespread unrest and discontent throughout the land, and that, in the case of young and old alike, many are in a condition of despair?