

*Proposed Committee on Unemployment*

they were off the rails. I have the press dispatch of February 11 appearing in the *Montreal Gazette*, as follows:

Jobless Increase Alarming—Labour.  
Abbott Takes Sharp Issue  
With Unions' Figure  
of 580,000 Idle

And the dispatch goes on to say:

Spokesmen for the federal cabinet and for Canada's two largest labour congresses today came into sharp disagreement on the seriousness of the country's current unemployment.

A joint brief from the congresses described the situation as "alarming", but Finance Minister Abbott suggested the labour groups' jobless figures are wrong and said the winter unemployment picture is only "unpleasant."

Union officials claimed, in a submission to cabinet members, that unemployment now stands around 580,000, which would be a post-war peak.

Mr. Abbott held it was much lower, and he cautioned labour against taking a "too gloomy" outlook on the ground that this could slow down business expansion.

Apparently the highest post-war figure was 434,000 unemployed in 1949.

On the following day, February 12, these labour leaders issued a statement as a result of their interview with the cabinet. I received a copy and I presume every other member in the house was furnished with one. To my mind it is a most impressive document, and opens with these words:

Yesterday afternoon the enclosed joint submission on unemployment was presented to the Minister of Labour and other members of the cabinet.

It reviews the present unemployment situation in Canada as seen by the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada and the Canadian Congress of Labour and proposes certain remedies to relieve the present serious situation.

We regret the attitude of ministers in attendance was to regard the present high number of unemployed as not being a serious situation. It was suggested that as responsible labour leaders in Canada our organizations should not propagate an attitude of gloom which might have a retarding effect on plans for the coming year. Nevertheless we presented to the government the picture as we see it.

When reports start appearing in the daily press of soup kitchens being opened, bread lines being formed, unemployed workers rebelling at low unemployment insurance payments, families being evicted from their homes, all because of insecurity and unemployment, it is time to take this problem seriously.

On that same afternoon of Friday, February 12, the Minister of Finance was questioned in the house, and on that occasion he did not seem to take the situation any more seriously than he had done before. His statement, as reported at page 2026 of *Hansard*, is as follows:

These are some of the measures which the government has taken to adapt government policy to current conditions. If economic activity declines, the government is in a position to take stronger action in these and other directions, but I should

[Mr. Green.]

like to emphasize that as I and my colleagues view the present situation there is no justification for stronger action—

The following day a report was issued by the bureau of statistics showing that unemployment insurance benefits in December of 1953 totalled \$16,882,000 as compared with \$10,926,000 a year earlier and \$10,172,000 for the month of November, 1953. It shows that compensation was paid for 5,413,000 days of idleness as against 3,586,000 in December of 1952 and that there were increases in December in the number of initial and renewal claims in all the provinces, as compared with the same time last year.

I have gone to some length in giving these figures and reading these statements because they lay the groundwork for the amendment I am going to move. We believe this problem of unemployment is important and that it is serious. We are not trying to frighten the Canadian people or to upset plans for the development of the country. But we are convinced that the unemployment question is now serious, and that it should be faced at this time, rather than weeks or months hence.

The submission of the labour leaders, in its closing paragraph, says this:

When unemployment reaches the proportions now being experienced in Canada, it has more than economic effects. It carries with it social problems and political potentials which cannot be ignored.

Unemployed workers and their families must be relieved of their hardship and suffering. But equally important, we must create and maintain a stable Canada, economically, socially and politically.

I believe there is great value in acting on this problem without delay. It is obvious that there are wide differences between the situation as portrayed by the labour leaders and the picture given by the Minister of Labour (Mr. Gregg), by the Minister of Finance and, presumably, by other members in the cabinet. Frankly, there is not very much hope in the statements of any of these ministers that this problem is going to be dealt with effectively or at an early date.

In any event we believe that parliament, as distinct from the cabinet, has a responsibility in this matter. The private member of parliament, attending here as a representative of thousands of his fellow Canadians, has a direct responsibility to do something about the question. Parliament must be supreme in this land. For too long now parliament has sat back and allowed the cabinet to do everything. Parliament has been brushed aside by the cabinet ever since war broke out in 1939. It is time that sort of thing stopped. Parliament must no longer be pushed into the background; and it is the