

Supply—Labour

Mr. Martin (Essex East): —as to the government's intentions with regard to the winter works program. The Minister of Labour has not given us satisfactory answers on this question. When we recall the situation that prevailed in this house last summer, when the Leader of the Opposition in particular reminded the government that there was likely to be a high level of unemployment in the fall of 1958 and in the winter of 1959, and on that account it would be wise to take preparatory steps so that any government program designed to put unemployed people to work during those two periods could be taken with a maximum result. In view of that experience we feel, notwithstanding the questions that have been put to the Minister of Labour during the course of the past month, we should take advantage of this last opportunity to ask the Prime Minister whether the government, in the face of certain indices indicating some measure of unemployment next winter, will not take the committee into its confidence at this time so that the kind of situation deplored the other day by the mayor of Ottawa could be obviated and municipalities could be given an opportunity to prepare their budgets for schemes that are designed to put men and women to work.

We were not satisfied, of course, with the results of the winter works program last year, a program that put some 35,000 men to work out of half a million of unemployed in our country. That scheme, inadequate though it was, was better than nothing. It would seem, in order to make it more effective, that advance notice well ahead of time should be given to municipalities and to provinces so that they could be made aware of the government's intention. The result would be, I am sure, that next spring, assuming the existence of unemployment on something like a comparable or even on a lesser level, the problem would have been more effectively mitigated than was the case this year.

It is not good enough to have the government announce its program, as it was announced last year, in the middle of the fall, at a time when the provinces and the municipalities could not take full advantage of the government's proposal. While the economic situation in the country would seem to bear promise of an improvement—and we all hope that is the case even beyond the indications given by the Minister of Finance—there are indices that point to the fact that there will be unemployment again next fall and winter. The level may not be apparent or fully known but that it will exist I think is incontestable. That being

the case, I hope on this the last night of the present session the government will take parliament into its confidence and announce its intentions so that the necessary and preparatory steps can be taken.

I am sure the Prime Minister is seized with the importance of this situation and I hope that he will be able to take advantage of the opportunity now afforded to him of announcing to the country what the government's policy in this particular will be.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Chairman, certainly these last hours of the session do reveal a tremendous change in the thinking of the hon. gentleman. He started off this session by picturing dire and terrible unemployment and mounting unemployment situations. I presume that these are almost his last words in this session. He says that while the economic situation would seem to indicate improvement there should be some announcement made regarding a winter works program. Certainly, Mr. Chairman, such a material change in the gloomy outlook of the hon. gentleman indicates that he too, in common with Canadians as a whole, has a realization of the tremendous economic upsurge in this country in the last few months. I know that he is just as desirous as everyone else to note this improvement and that he will be very pleased with the economic change that has taken place which we, with becoming modesty, are able to say we contributed to by the policies which we introduced. With respect to the question asked by the hon. gentleman—

Mr. Martin (Essex East): That was what I was interested in.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I must say I have learned from the hon. gentleman because he usually starts off at length regarding matters that are not covered by the question before he asks the question.

Mr. Chevrier: The Prime Minister has nothing to learn in that respect.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I want to say that the Minister of Labour is watching this improvement with the greatest of interest and also with the anticipation that it will continue.

In so far as the winter works program is concerned, we are very proud of the record that was established in employment as a result of the introduction of this plan and as events transpire within the next few weeks a decision will be made in lots of time, in the event that it is decided to proceed with the plan, to assure that the success of last winter will be multiplied and the number employed under the plan during the coming winter.