

Unemployment

Alberta are entitled to more than one-quarter of what the federal government may collect in income taxes for doing nothing toward the exploration and development of gas in Canada.

Mr. Ferguson: They have collected all their taxes for doing nothing.

Mr. H. R. Argue (Assiniboia): As the current debate on unemployment progresses, it becomes more and more evident that this government has no policy whatever for dealing with this very important problem. As a matter of fact, as more and more statistics become available as to the magnitude of the unemployment problem, and as statistics become available regarding the continuous drop in farm income, it is becoming evident that this is a depression government led by an indifferent Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent). It is a depression government because over 600,000 persons in Canada are out of work and have no visible means of livelihood. When one adds to the list of unemployed those who are dependent upon the unemployed, their children and their wives, it is clear that at least a million, if not more, Canadians have little or no income.

I am amazed that the Prime Minister has not entered this debate long ago and presented the policy of the government of Canada for dealing with this most important current problem. Instead, we had speeches from two cabinet ministers on the first day of the debate, almost a month ago. Even though the unemployment situation has become progressively worse, the government is silent. So far as dealing with unemployment is concerned apparently the Prime Minister is on strike. He is sitting it out. He is not entering this debate, as I believe he should, to place before parliament and the people of the country the policy of the government for dealing with this most important problem. When asked in the house if the matter of unemployment would be a subject for discussion at the coming dominion-provincial conference, the Prime Minister replied that he would be greatly surprised if that question was not discussed while the provincial premiers were here.

Instead of saying that he would be surprised if the question were not discussed, the Prime Minister should have given this nation some leadership by outlining in parliament the proposals his government was prepared to make to the coming dominion-provincial conference. This is a far cry from the attitude of the government 10 years ago when it faced a similar dominion-provincial conference and it brought out its voluminous green book proposals. There was no question then as to the policy of the government. Its

proposals were clear, and all could see them. This time the government is saying nothing. The Prime Minister is not even telling the country whether or not he is prepared to place the subject of unemployment high on the agenda of the coming dominion-provincial conference. A statement that the Prime Minister and the government are not prepared to set forth a program to deal with unemployment shows me that the government and the Prime Minister have abdicated the role of leadership.

Mr. Martin: Why don't you read the exact words of the Prime Minister and not give your own interpretation, which is wrong.

Mr. Argue: There goes the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Martin) again. I quoted the Prime Minister's exact words, and I would be very happy to have—

Mr. Martin: The Prime Minister—and I hope I have the hon. member's permission to interrupt—

Mr. Argue: Yes.

Mr. Martin: The Prime Minister did not say what my hon. friend is now paraphrasing as to what he did say.

Mr. Argue: The Prime Minister said that he would be greatly surprised if that question was not discussed while they were here.

Mr. Martin: Yes.

Mr. Argue: And that is exactly what I said he said.

Mr. Martin: No. My hon. friend said that the Prime Minister was not prepared to discuss this question. Now, the Prime Minister never said that.

Mr. Argue: I never said what the Minister of National Health and Welfare has said I said. But I would suggest to the Minister of National Health and Welfare, as one of the frontbenchers of the cabinet, and as a minister of the crown, that he stand up in this debate now and say what the government—his government—is prepared to do about unemployment. Instead of that, what does he do? He interrupts, that is all. He interrupts opposition members when they are trying to get some action out of the government. I will quote what the Prime Minister said.

Mr. Martin: That is better.

Mr. Argue: On March 10, in answer to a question asked by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Drew), he said this—and perhaps I had better read the question. It is as follows:

Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the Prime Minister if, in view of the fact that this preliminary