

Supply—Labour

country in March, 1958 that in regard to unemployment, and I quote from one of his speeches:

—we have gone over the top and are on the way down.

The Minister of Labour speaking in a by-election in December 1958, said that by the middle of 1959, and I quote from his address:

—we will be well out of the woods.

In Winnipeg on March 5, 1958, the Minister of Labour said, and I quote from the press account of his speech:

It is our duty to see that no Canadian suffers a single loss of a job this year.

I point out that the situation has been getting worse instead of better since the time the Prime Minister and the Minister of Labour made those statements. The position in so far as unemployment is concerned has worsened very materially. It has worsened to the point where the percentage of unemployed to the total labour force is now 8.1 per cent. This is a pretty high percentage and, as the committee knows, it has been estimated that anything that goes beyond 5 per cent is serious and immediate means should be taken to remedy the situation. Unfortunately, I am sorry to say, the government thus far has not faced up to the problem. The first question that comes to mind is this: has the government an over-all plan to deal with unemployment? Has the government a plan to deal with the situation which now faces it? Is the government in favour of full employment? Does the government think the puny winter works program will meet the situation which faces us at the present time?

In answer to what the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway said in a very heated manner when he challenged this side of the house to produce any evidence of proposals to deal with the situation, let me say two things. First of all, the hon. member for Essex East, not only in this house but elsewhere, has put on the record a program, as did the Leader of the Opposition during the two campaigns of 1957 and 1958, to deal with the situation. Again, let me say this: by virtue of our parliamentary institutions, the responsibility for the situation lies over on that side of the house; the responsibility for this problem is that of the government. I have some recollections, too. I remember what was said from this side of the house when a situation entirely unlike this one arose in years gone by. We were charged, and we alone were charged, with the responsibility of dealing with the unemployment. If that was the case in those years, certainly it is the case now, and I ask the minister what is the proposal to deal with the position in which he finds himself?

The minister and the government must accept responsibility; the minister and the government must do better than they have done up to now in facing up to the situation. They have to live up to the statements made by the Prime Minister and several ministers of the crown. If you want to call them promises, that is all right; but the point is, it has been said in this house so often that you have lived up to our promises. I have put on the record here a number of promises dealing with the textile industry alone, and I say respectfully that the promises in that field have not been lived up to. There were some 80,000 people employed in that industry in the province of Quebec and in certain parts of Ontario up until recently. I know the numbers have decreased substantially.

Then there are a number of proposals which have been put forward by the hon. member for Essex East. I want to deal with but one of those because, in his anxiety to put them all on the record, he perhaps did not give to this one the attention which he otherwise would have given to it had he been dealing with it alone. It is but one of the points which he has brought to the attention of the committee and I bring it to the attention of the minister. It is this: what consideration is being given to the intensification of the vocational training program? I have not the figures before me, but I understand that about one quarter of the people who are unemployed are either unskilled workers or workers whose trades are no longer required in the labour force. Here I have particular reference to a speech which was made by the chief commissioner of the unemployment insurance commission. As far as I can gather from the press he dealt with the subject in a very constructive manner. I am told the speech was delivered in the month of November, 1959. His suggestion was that it would be wise to give consideration to putting unskilled workers into vocational schools so that during the time they were unemployed they could get the benefit of a vocational training program which would assist them at a later date to find employment.

Mr. Starr: If the hon. member does not mind my interrupting, may I say that the program he outlined lies entirely within the jurisdiction of the commission itself, in that they approve certain courses during which time a trainee, or a person who is going through those courses and having made sufficient contributions, can draw unemployment insurance benefits in order to help him. I have no objection; I am prepared to approve all the courses that the unemployment insurance commission sanctions.