

*Supply—Labour*

its confidence on Thursday last? As I said earlier, we could have dealt with this matter expeditiously, as we intend to do today, and the house would have adjourned for Easter, and the Prime Minister's promise would have been kept. We know, today, that this was the only item which had to be passed on a basis of urgency. Why did members on the treasury benches opposite not tell us on Thursday that this was an urgent matter? They said nothing. They allowed the committee to believe they wanted all the items in the supplementary estimates passed, hoping no one would pay any particular attention to this \$1 item—hoping it would pass unnoticed and that the people of this country would not have known that this fund is now bankrupt.

**Mr. Knowles:** But for my innocent question.

**Mr. Churchill:** That is right; a planted question.

**Mr. Starr:** What happened yesterday? The Minister of Labour has not taken us into his confidence. Did the government get another \$15 million yesterday. Was this appropriated for the fund? The hon. gentleman should answer this question honestly. If so, it must have been appropriated by means of the Governor General's warrant of last year and, in that case, what is the legality of spending this amount in the present fiscal year? Have members of the government sitting opposite conferred with the Minister of Justice to ascertain the legality or otherwise of using this money which they appropriated yesterday, or is this another example of illegality such as this government is getting into the habit of displaying? We had an example not too long ago of the law being broken. Here is another.

The first information we had of this situation was when the member for Winnipeg North Centre asked that innocent question. I repeat that the government tried to conceal the fact that the unemployment insurance fund was broke, and that in doing so they gave clear evidence of irresponsibility. The question arises: Who wanted to keep this information from parliament? Who got the idea that parliament should not be told that the fund was on the brink of bankruptcy? Was it the Minister of Finance? Was it the Minister of Transport? Whose idea was it? If it was the idea of the Minister of Finance, then he went to Quebec and left the Minister of Labour holding the bag. The Minister of Labour had been selected to go to Quebec and we wonder why he is here today. Was the bag left with him—empty? The hon. gentleman now admits that they hid this situation from parliament and today, when the situation has become acute, he asks parliament for approval to make this loan.

[Mr. Starr.]

The minister should tell us now whether or not an appropriation of \$15 million was made yesterday and whether it has been ascertained that the money appropriated yesterday can legally be spent during the current fiscal year. Regardless of the fumbling, irresponsible government that we see before us now, we as members of parliament have a responsibility to pass this item, so that over half a million unemployed Canadians shall not be deprived of their unemployment insurance benefit payments.

**Mr. Knowles:** I suppose I should make it clear at the outset that I am not an innocent abroad. I realize that when the hon. member for Ontario used the word "innocent" he applied it to my question, not to me.

**Mr. Pickersgill:** What is the hon. member guilty of?

**Mr. Knowles:** I am guilty of having asked the government and the house to schedule a debate on this item at eight o'clock tonight so that any concern or alarm which might be felt in the country as a result of yesterday's news can be allayed.

I am glad to join with the hon. member for Ontario in saying that it is the responsibility of this committee to pass this item this evening so that the people who have to draw unemployment insurance benefits can be assured positively that there will be money in the bag to pay their claims. As the hon. member for Ontario says, it was because of a question which I asked yesterday that the minister admitted that this difficulty was facing us. Hence our request today that we sit tonight, even though it is not usual for us to sit on Wednesday evenings, and get this matter cleared up.

I hope that in the course of the further remarks which I trust he will make the minister will make it clear that the passing of this item, even though it is only \$1, has the legislative effect of ensuring that there will be sufficient money in the fund to pay all claims which may be presented during the period when the fund is being built up by further contributions.

It seems to me that, even though the whole question is somewhat technical, we should have a more detailed explanation than the Minister of Labour has yet given us. It has been my experience here that these \$1 items are sometimes much more complicated than the items for millions or hundreds of millions of dollars. It has also been my experience that items in the estimates that legislate seem to have different results. I can recall items in the estimates, that I thought applied only to the fiscal year in which they were passed, having a continuing effect down