

Unemployment Assistance

Mr. Diefenbaker: Do you mean constitutionally?

Mr. Martin: No, no. I said as a result of declared policy.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Oh, declared policy.

An hon. Member: Liberal policy.

Mr. Martin: In 1945 proposals were made by the federal government. From what the hon. member for Vancouver East has just read, it is clear that it was never agreed that we should assume 100 per cent responsibility for the unemployed employables. Indeed, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Drew) himself, in the references that will be found in the submission to that conference at page 247, clearly indicated that the federal government was not assuming 100 per cent responsibility for the unemployed employables. As is found at that page he said this:

Under these definitions a large proportion of the cost of unemployment assistance to persons actually employable would fall on the provinces and municipalities.

As the hon. member for Cape Breton South said last night, it is clear that the 1945 proposals do not provide as generous a contribution as is envisaged in this legislation because it was to operate for a limited period. To the extent to which we were prepared to assist the unemployed employables, that was only to run for two years.

Mrs. Fairclough: Until the Unemployment Insurance Act became operative.

Mr. Martin: Yes; and it was to be 85 per cent of the benefits provided under the Unemployment Insurance Act, which percentage was increased in 1952, as my friend the hon. member for Hamilton West knows, to 100 per cent. So what we are doing in this bill is to wipe out—once we reach the threshold, .45 per cent—the distinction, I hope for all time, between the unemployed employables and those who are unemployed and who cannot work. That is a great step, as any social worker in this country knows, and as the hon. member for Cape Breton South so well said last night.

Is it fair to ask that there should be a threshold? Under our constitution we have municipal governments, provincial governments and a federal government. Each has its responsibilities. On the basis of figures available, for instance, on June 1, 1955, in Newfoundland the number of individuals remaining as 100 per cent provincial responsibilities because of the .45 per cent threshold was 1,854 out of a population of 412,000. That includes unemployed employables and

[Mr. Martin.]

unemployables. Having in mind the character of this confederation of ours, will any hon. member in this house deny that there is on the municipalities and on the provinces a responsibility to look after a certain group, up to a certain figure, of their own people? At one time that was done by the family, by the church and later by government, but it certainly is not asking too much that the province of Newfoundland and its municipalities should look after that number of people. Whenever it reaches beyond that, under this measure, the federal government will enter the picture.

In Prince Edward Island the number is 486; in Nova Scotia, 3,073; New Brunswick, 2,511; Quebec, 20,240.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Does this include not only the unemployed employables but also those who, through disability, are incapable of performing work?

Mr. Martin: Both. The figure for Ontario is 23,323. The province of Ontario with over 5 million people is one of the wealthiest provinces in Canada. Is there any hon. member in this house who will suggest that the federal government should be expected to provide assistance for that number and that it represents a load too heavy to be borne by the provincial government? I am not suggesting this by way of criticism. I am simply expressing this by way of exposing the fallacy of the argument offered by the hon. member for Vancouver East (Mr. Winch).

Mrs. Fairclough: May I ask the minister a question? These are the June figures, but you do not have the January figures, do you?

Mr. Martin: These are based on the June 1, 1955 estimate of the dominion bureau of statistics. The figure for Manitoba is 3,820; Saskatchewan, 4,000. I may say that the record of the conference will show that the province of Saskatchewan was amongst those who emphasized the importance of both municipalities and provinces not only having complete control of the administration of this matter, but they said they did not think we should tell them that they should assume full responsibility for all without exacting a contribution from the municipalities; if we did so, we would be creating for them and for us great difficulties. I think that is obvious. The figure for Alberta is 4,797 and for British Columbia 5,872. I think, therefore, no one will seriously contest that there is a point where, having in mind the proximity of the people in the particular context I am speaking of to the provinces and municipalities, the latter should have a responsibility up to a point, exclusively. Then, when that becomes