

*Supply—Labour*

**Mr. Winch:** What about the position of these people two days ago?

**Mr. Starr:** You are criticizing us for what we did last year.

**Mr. Martin (Essex East):** The last statement by the Minister of Labour was most unusual. He is saying that because of the fact that the government has provided supplementary payments the fund has been depleted. He might have added that it has been seriously imperilled, as we now know, because of the fact that it has now been reduced to \$496 million. But if the fund has been imperilled, that is only one of the contributing reasons and it is not even the major reason. The major reason for the depletion of the fund is that we have had in the last two years the highest level of unemployment we have experienced in the history of Canada except for the years 1930 and 1935. That is the reason why the fund has been so seriously depleted. The hon. minister takes satisfaction because, he alleges, the unemployment figures at the present time are even less than was reported on May 20. That is a situation which will be welcomed by everyone in this country.

But the figures now before us show a serious and continuing problem of unemployment—445,000 persons without jobs and seeking work. That represents a decrease of 80,000 compared with the previous month, but 445,000 out of work is nevertheless a serious figure. The minister says he can show that the number has been considerably reduced since those figures were issued. I would be interested in knowing what is the revised figure. It should not be forgotten that the reported statistics as contained in this monthly release do not cover all the workers of the country and that in addition to the 445,000 must be added at least another 60,000 who are not included in the standard of measurement used by the bureau of statistics in the compilation it presents monthly. The minister can correct me if I am wrong in this assumption.

In any event, there is a serious problem of unemployment still confronting us, and the request made by the Leader of the Opposition and repeated on Friday last by other hon. members of this house was founded upon the desire to elicit from this government its plans for dealing with this hard core of unemployment which, according to every indication, is likely to continue into the fall of 1959 and into the winter of 1960 at levels we hope not at all comparable with what we have experienced during the past two years.

The request of the Leader of the Opposition is, surely, not an unfair one. The minister

[Mr. Starr.]

replies by saying that it is the responsibility of the government to announce policy, and that the government will announce its policy when it feels it is the proper time to do so. I say this to the Minister of Labour: if it is the responsibility of government to formulate policy, as undoubtedly it is, then it is also the responsibility of the government to recognize the duty which it owes to parliament, and parliament is asking now, through some of its members, for a declaration of policy for the ensuing months.

We do not want to be confronted next winter with a situation such as attended us this winter, namely finding that the government had embarked on an employment program in the late fall too late to give that program an opportunity for providing work for a much greater number of people than the 33,000 or 35,000 persons provided for under the government's winter works program. That program, in its results, did not touch the problem of unemployment, and in making this request to the minister we are, in fact, asking the government to let this first item stand so that we shall not be caught by a situation at the end of the session which would not offer us the same instrument for calling the attention of the government, if the situation should warrant it, to the fact that it has not brought forward at this early period a program designed to take care of the unemployment situation which may exist in the fall, or in the winter of 1960.

If the government has a program for next fall or next winter, can that program not be announced now? If the minister would tell us what that program is, this item will go through very speedily. If the minister would rise and say that the government has not decided on what kind of program, if any, it is going to present to parliament to take care of the situation next fall and next winter, then that at least would be a reply, and the opposition would have to consider the course it should follow. But the minister does not give us any indication whether or not this winter works program is to continue.

Surely, he sees himself that some announcement is desirable. I know he does. I regret he should find himself in his present position because, as I said the other day, if he had direction of this matter there is no doubt what he would do: he would come forward now with a program. But obviously his colleagues are not agreed on this subject, and he must therefore take responsibility for the failure of the government to tell parliament and the nation at this time what its program is to be.