

Supply—Labour

The applicant is usually refused the advantage of benefits. He may be offered employment in an adjacent town, but in a lot of instances the job is gone before he gets there. The minister should take a close, long look at this practice because it certainly must reflect itself in the figures he quoted this evening. He would find a considerably larger number of people would be involved if a more honest approach were taken to such cases.

I listened to the minister giving the figures with regard to the amount of money required over the past few years, and with regard to the diminishing amounts required in the last two years. This in large measure represents the policies of the former government and the success which they had. In fact this was pointed out to us by the former minister of labour when he told about the employees of a large firm who assured him this was the case, and expressed their gratitude.

In regard to the importance of the critical situation which faces the unemployment insurance fund, it was the hon. member for Cape Breton South who first drew attention to it, as reported at page 1585 of *Hansard* for Monday, March 30, when he said:

Some of us are anxious to deal with other matters including the position of the unemployment insurance fund, which has dried up.

I understand, as stated by the President of the Privy Council this evening, that under the appropriations bill the government does not have the authority to make expenditures from the fund regardless of how much money was left in the fund after midnight of March 31, but I wonder exactly how much money is left in the fund. I do not think the minister has given us this and, as was stated by the hon. member for Ontario, the reason for this special sitting tonight is that this is the important item which must be passed, and this was the reason why the situation which existed last Thursday evening occurred.

I can see no other reason for the whole development that has taken place up to this evening. Again no one has disagreed to sitting tonight in order to take care of this crisis. I shall have more to say about this next week when we resume the budget debate, but I blame the Minister of Finance for the situation, no matter how much responsibility falls on other ministers who are present this evening. He must have been aware of the situation or else he was delinquent in his responsibilities to the people, and particularly to the Minister of Labour, in not seeing that the situation was dealt with expeditiously last week.

The Minister of Finance is not present tonight and, as I say, I shall go into this further next week. I believe he should take

a close look at his responsibilities to the parliament of Canada and see that the business of the house is expeditiously handled, so that the Minister of Labour will not be placed in such an embarrassing set of circumstances.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Plourde: Mr. Chairman, the hon. member for St. Hyacinthe-Bagot (Mr. Ricard) was saying a moment ago that he was speaking on behalf of the Quebec members. Apparently he is ashamed for he has been hiding behind the curtain ever since—

Mr. Ricard: I rise on a question of privilege—

Mr. Plourde: He may very well speak on behalf of the eight Conservatives, but as far as we are concerned we can uphold our rights ourselves.

Mr. Ricard: Mr. Chairman, on a question of privilege—

The Chairman: Order. The hon. member for St. Hyacinthe-Bagot rose on a question of privilege.

Mr. Ricard: Mr. Chairman, I would like to point out that I was probably guilty of a slip of the tongue when I said a little earlier that I was speaking on behalf of the hon. member for Quebec East (Mr. Beaulé) because I do not think it would be an honour to do so and I would rather not speak for him. I apologize. I intended rather to speak for hon. members of the Conservative party on this side of the house.

Mr. Plourde: For the eight Conservative members. However, I must say that it is not the hon. member for Quebec East but rather the hon. member for Quebec West and that the latter is still able to take care of himself when the time comes.

In the province of Quebec, especially in my riding of Quebec West, I know that there is unemployment. That is why I am happy to be here tonight to see that these estimates are passed, because I would not like those who are entitled to unemployment insurance benefits to be deprived of them.

It is nice to hear the Minister of Labour (Mr. MacEachen) say that unemployment is decreasing since, according to him, the amount that parliament has to supply for that item is lower this year.

On the other hand, if we had before us the amounts of the estimates spent on unemployment assistance, we might doubt his words because they bring to our mind, in a way, what the hon. member for Timmins (Mr. Martin) said a little earlier: They are going to great lengths to prevent workers from being eligible for unemployment insurance