

Supply—Labour

meantime to deal with this situation. I am thinking particularly of the plans for winter work which, as the minister I believe himself agreed the other day, should be put into train at the earliest possible moment.

I am speaking now from recollection but I think I am right, and the minister may be able to correct me if I am wrong. I believe a request of this kind was made at least once in the past, namely that the item, without prejudice, should be allowed to stand after the discussion had been completed, for the purpose I have indicated; I think I am right in saying that the request was accepted at that time by the previous administration.

The reason I make this request is that the figures which have been recently released—I think they were released yesterday—show an encouraging improvement in the employment picture. From that improvement no doubt the government can take a special satisfaction, but we all rejoice in it. Nevertheless, in spite of that improvement, there are still some 445,000 unemployed on the basis of the bureau of statistics estimates—perhaps that is not the exact figure, but I think it is something like that—or something over 700,000 on the basis of the other calculation. That remains, of course, a serious situation; and justifies the request we are making, namely that when its consideration at this time is concluded—and perhaps it is not concluded yet—this item should be permitted to stand so that at the end of the session it can be brought forward again. Then we can have a look at the employment situation at that time and get from the government before this session of parliament ends a statement of its plans for winter works programs or anything else it may have in mind which will bring about an improvement in the situation. We recognize it is improving but a great deal more improvement is required before we on this side of the house can be satisfied with the picture in this country.

Mr. Starr: In reply to the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Chairman, I must say at once, as I said last week when my estimates were before the committee, that I cannot accede to that request. These are the estimates of the Department of Labour. The responsibility for action on unemployment in this country is that of the government. The government will have to decide what action it will take and the appropriate time for that action.

The figures that have been quoted by the hon. member are a month old. Since then there has been a further improvement. Hence the situation is not as dark as he tries to paint it at this moment. It is much brighter, and we hope it will continue to

become brighter still. But the responsibility for action in this matter is still with the government. When the government feels that it is the appropriate time to assess the situation, it will do so and will reveal its plans.

Mr. Winch: I should like to ask the minister: when is an appropriate time? The hon. gentleman has just stated that the figures quoted by my hon. friend on my left are a year old—

Mr. Starr: A month old.

Mr. Winch: I am sorry. A month old. I was in Vancouver only two days ago, and two days ago in Vancouver, because no action has been taken by the Minister of Labour or by the government in response to repeated requests from this side of the house for action which would extend the period of seasonal benefits, between 7,000 and 8,000 men were cut off unemployment insurance. That is according to the figures given by the Vancouver *Sun* and the Vancouver *Province* when I was in Vancouver at that time.

What are those men supposed to do? When is an appropriate time to take care of those 7,000-8,000 men who were cut off from benefits two days ago because no action had been taken to continue the payment of unemployment insurance? As nearly as I could point out—and I was only able to spend two or three hours in Vancouver—the answer they were given was: apply for social welfare. That was the answer the government gave in Vancouver two days ago. When is the appropriate time for action by this government—afterwards or before? I would appreciate an answer. I asked this question about a month ago, and so did others on this side of the house. What are these men supposed to do? Starve to death? Apparently they are.

Mr. Starr: In answer to the hon. member I want to remind him again that this government extended seasonal benefits for two months.

Mr. Winch: I admit that.

Mr. Starr: This government also extended seasonal benefits by an additional six weeks last year.

Mr. Winch: I admit that, too.

Mr. Starr: Because of this situation, the fund has been depleted to such an extent that we must now consider increasing the contribution rates on the advice of the actuary. We are now being criticized in this house for depleting the fund, and we did it in order to help people such as the hon. member has described.