

Unemployment Conditions

want to take a few moments to say there is urgency of debate, but I take exception to what the Prime Minister has said in that he has indicated that if discussion of the three items of business announced last night is completed before the end of the day, there will be an opportunity today or again on Friday to discuss the matter of unemployment under the item having to do with the winter works program.

I want to bring to Your Honour's attention the fact that when this matter was discussed the other day by the hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate and the hon. member for Essex East, the chairman made it quite clear that there was to be no general discussion of unemployment under that head. He made it quite clear to the committee that, as he understood the rules, we could discuss the winter works program and nothing else.

Therefore it seems to me, in view of the position placed on the record by the hon. member for Gloucester, that there is urgency of debate unless, of course, the position taken by the chairman of committees is reversed by the house and by Your Honour.

Mr. Hazen Argue (Assiniboia): On the point of order that has been raised, I believe the matter is of great urgency because of the extent of the figures that have just been issued, and because there seems to be an indication that the situation is likely to get much worse in the near future, particularly in specific areas such as Elliot Lake.

As to the urgency of the situation, I would point out something, Mr. Speaker, that you probably already know; that the Ontario legislature debated a similar but more specific motion yesterday, dealing with unemployment at Elliot Lake and Bancroft because of the decisions taken by the companies concerned, and as a result of that debate I think a similar debate should take place here. That might then be followed by action on the part of both governments.

As to the Prime Minister's suggestion that either later today or on Friday we might have a general debate on unemployment under the item of the estimates concerning the winter works program, I can only say that I am amazed that the Prime Minister should make this suggestion. It leads me to believe that he is of the opinion that procedure in this house is in the hands of the government and does not depend upon decisions by Your Honour or by the Deputy Speaker. In view of the rulings that have already been made I know of only one way whereby we can have a general debate on unemployment under this item, and that is by unanimous consent. I am certain that unanimous consent could be obtained from the house, but I do

[Mr. Chevrier.]

not think it is the prerogative of the Prime Minister to appear to direct the house as to what our proceedings shall be.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, what you listened to a moment ago is just an example of complete irresponsibility. I said that an opportunity would be given to discuss the matter but that naturally it would require the unanimous consent of the house. The hon. member has answered himself by saying there would be no doubt that unanimous consent could be secured.

Hon. Paul Martin (Essex East): Mr. Speaker, I should like to join with those who have urged on Your Honour the urgent importance of the motion now before the house and of its acceptance. The Prime Minister has indicated there can be no doubt that unanimous approval would be given so as to permit a general discussion of this question of unemployment. Unless that were to take place forthwith there would be no answer in the Prime Minister's offer to the motion before the house.

The motion, sir, is predicated on the seriousness of unemployment as revealed in the joint release this morning by the Department of Trade and Commerce and the Department of Labour. The seriousness and the urgency of the problem, however, have been further indicated since we have come into the house today. It is even more serious than indicated in the release, according to the Minister of Labour (Mr. Starr) in his answer to starred question No. 30. The minister indicated that the number of people in receipt of unemployment insurance, in other words live claimants, has risen from 685,000 to 782,542. This means that this number are in receipt of unemployment insurance benefits. This in itself, sir, indicates, I say to you, the urgency of the matter.

Unless the Prime Minister could initiate, or the house itself could initiate, an immediate discussion of this problem, anything that has been suggested by the Prime Minister thus far would not be an answer to the motion which clearly establishes the question of urgency at this time.

Mr. Speaker: Before I deal with the matter I may say there is perhaps some ground for the suggestion made by the Prime Minister. I appreciate the fact that the supplementary estimates of the Department of Labour, to which he had reference, are not broad enough in themselves to permit a general debate on unemployment and, as has been pointed out, the chairman in committee has restricted the debate to the matters under—