

*Supply—Labour*

reply to the questions which were asked him earlier by the hon. member for Essex East. I know he asked him what the balance was in the unemployment insurance fund at the end of February.

**Mr. Chevrier:** That was my question.

**Mr. Robichaud:** I wish to correct myself; it was the hon. member for Laurier. In addition, what was the number of claimants receiving benefits as at the end of February?

**Mr. Thrasher:** Mr. Chairman, I had hoped to answer any questions at the conclusion of hon. members' remarks. The balance in the fund at the end of February was \$104,618,000. Unfortunately the figures regarding applicants are not yet available for February.

**Mr. Pickersgill:** Before this item carries, Mr. Chairman, there are one or two observations I wish to make that I did not have the opportunity to make the other day. I said the other day that we would never have been asked to vote this \$25 million if the government had shown any sense of responsibility or any appreciation of the fact that there was a problem to be solved. I was very much interested to hear the hon. member for Timmins trying desperately to support his party's favorite thesis that there is no difference between the way the Liberals managed this affair and the way the Tories have, but he made a pretty poor job of it because he had to admit that there was \$928 million in the fund when this government took office. We have now been told that at the end of February last there was only \$104 million, which I think dramatically demonstrates the difference.

I think the hon. member for Peterborough, who did not attempt to square the circle perhaps because he is a little wiser even though younger, put his finger on the point right away when he said this legislation was not designed for a period of prolonged and chronic unemployment. Rather it was designed for a period of full employment and, of course, that is what we had in this country up until 1957.

I think it might be useful to illustrate that it is not Liberal propaganda when I say that we had full employment up until 1957. I have in my hands the proceedings of the dominion-provincial conference which met on the 25th of November, 1957. To that conference the Prime Minister gave an appraisal of the unemployment situation in Canada. Remember, sir, that this was a formal appraisal given to the premiers after this government had been in office for five months. They no longer had any excuse for not knowing the facts. Oh, I know they pretend—the Minister of Public Works in that helpful spirit he always shows

[Mr. Robichaud.]

in the house brought it up the other day—that the Liberals knew away back in March of 1957 that there was going to be heavy unemployment, but these bright gentlemen after five months on the treasury benches had no such idea. They were not bright enough to see the facts.

Here is the Prime Minister's formal opinion as to the state of unemployment in November, 1957, five months after this government took office. It has been put on the record before, but it is very relevant because it shows why we are in the situation we are in now. It shows the refusal of the government at any stage to treat the problem seriously. What the Prime Minister said to the premiers was not an off the cuff statement. I was present as a spectator at that conference, and I remember that the Prime Minister read from a document that had obviously been very carefully prepared in advance as his judgment of the unemployment situation in November of 1957. He said:

I wish now to say a word or two on the question of unemployment. In many countries of the free world there has been a pause this year—

**Mr. Pallett:** Is that the dominion-provincial conference?

**Mr. Pickersgill:** In 1957. If the hon. member had done me the honour of listening he would have heard the reference when I first gave it.

**Mr. Pallett:** The hon. member said 1957, but he did not indicate the document.

**Mr. Pickersgill:** I said I was going to refer to the proceedings of the dominion-provincial conference of 1957 which began its sessions on the 25th of November, and that these words are from the opening address by the Prime Minister to the premiers. This was the first time the Prime Minister gave an official appraisal. He had been in office for five months then, and at that time he gave an official appraisal of the unemployment situation as he saw it after five months in office. This was the Prime Minister's judgment after having had five months to study the problem:

I wish now to say a word or two on the question of unemployment. In many countries of the free world there has been a pause this year in the rapid pace of development and, as in 1954 and 1955, an increase in unemployment. You will remember in those years that while the percentage of unemployed in Canada in relationship to the number employed was much higher than it is today—

This is the Prime Minister saying that, not I.

—that fact and those circumstances did not herald the beginning of depression. What actually happened was that there was a levelling off process which subsequently led to an even wider development and expansion program. When I say that, of course, I do not mean that prompt action must