

Supply—Labour

I urge the government to call a conference with the provinces. That was done before, and I ask this government now to do the same thing again. What possible excuse can they offer for not so doing? Do they not at least owe this house some explanation? The Minister of Labour said that a year and a half ago a conference was called. I am not talking of a year and a half ago. I am talking about now, when we have the most serious unemployment problem since 1930-35. The government cannot sit in Lord Melbourne fashion in their seats and ignore this particular request. It is a proposal that stands before them and that must be answered by them.

Mr. Crouse: Would the hon. member permit a question? Would he advocate that enough power be granted to the federal government to effectively influence the rate of economic activity throughout this country? Does he believe we can legislate prosperity?

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I will say this to the hon. member. I believe this government could do what the Liberal government did in 1936 when we were faced with heavy unemployment inherited from the previous regime, namely take strong steps to meet it. I will discuss them later.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Let us not discuss this thing with too much heat. We want to discuss this topic. I am saying there are now close to 800,000 people looking for work; and no matter whatever may have happened before, this government, in the face of the assurances it gave the Canadian people—apart altogether from the responsibility a government has in any event—cannot shirk its responsibility and say, "What others did not do we should not be expected to do." That is not facing the responsibilities of government. This government simply must do some of the things which were done by the previous administration, when the level of unemployment never reached the proportions now confronting the country. It was then 2.9 per cent as compared with an average of 6.1 per cent between 1946 and 1957. That is the situation.

Mr. Pugh: Would the hon. member permit a question?

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I would rather like to get on with my 10-point program.

Mr. Pugh: I would appreciate it if he would permit it now. The percentage of unemployment is at the highest level of all time, according to his statement. I should like to know whether the hon. gentleman has taken into account the fact that since 1957 women

have been included in the unemployment figures, and that as of a month ago that total stood at 166,000. Does he know that a similar situation exists with regard to fishermen, whose number stood at 18,000? Are these two figures included in the hon. gentleman's total? They do not appear in the total for 1957 to which he is now referring.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I welcome that information but I would call your attention, Mr. Chairman, to the fact that this was not a question. It was an intervention.

An hon. Member: It was a mighty good one, anyway.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I think the hon. member ought to be very careful what he says in this debate because, as I told him the other day, his words become memorable once pronounced. What the hon. member for Okanagan Boundary has just said is correct, but I do not see how it alters the facts. We are dealing with a situation in which we are told by the Minister of Labour and by responsible agencies of government that 800,000 people, whether or not, are looking for work. If that is not a serious problem I do not know what kind of argument can be used to convince the hon. gentleman, and I know he is a sincere man who does not wish to understate this problem and who realizes that this is an issue which has to be faced by this government. But having in mind what the former leader of the opposition, Mr. Drew, said; what the hon. member for Greenwood, who now looks at me so anxiously, said; what the Prime Minister said, and what the Minister of Labour said—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): May I just finish my point? Having all those things in mind, surely this government cannot fail to call a conference with the provinces. Only yesterday in Ontario one member of the Ontario Conservative party was saying he intended to resign from that party unless something were done to ease unemployment in the Elliot Lake district, where three or four thousand people have suffered loss of work. The provinces are discussing unemployment. Why should not the provinces and this government get together, particularly when hon. gentlemen opposite themselves suggested this action by way of a motion in this house, on which they voted that the government of the day should arrange a conference to try to resolve the problem of unemployment.