

*Unemployment Continuance Act*

dominion to secure funds to enable the provinces to discharge, within the realm of their responsibilities, the obligations which rest upon them. This we hope to do within the next ten days, in order that the legislation which we will submit to this house to care for the future, beyond May 1, may be based upon as intelligent an understanding as we can have as to what are the obligations involved.

I can only repeat—and I say this with some degree of confidence—that I believe that there is no member of this house, of the legal or any other profession, reading those contracts that have been entered into between the provinces and the dominion, and knowing the terms in which the obligations must arise and the payments be made, who will not admit that it is essential that there should be some provision enabling the payments to be made in the future for the obligations created up to May 1. The right hon. leader of the opposition asked the other evening as to whether or not we contemplated the creation of new financial obligations. I answered that at the moment I had no knowledge of any beyond those connected with seed grain and the work of the relief commission. There may be a few others of which I have no knowledge at the moment, but it is not our intention to create other fresh obligations. But we must frankly meet the situation to which I have alluded, and I trust the committee will pardon me for repeating these matters as I have, because the responsibility for the moment rests with us, and I am anxious that the committee should have as full an understanding of the situation as possible. So I say that we ask this power, not for the purpose of abusing it but for the purpose of enabling us to meet obligations that have been honestly incurred, upon which the contracting provinces and municipalities rely, to enable them to make payment in cash or kind to those who have discharged unemployment work in the several parts of this dominion.

Mr. RALSTON: As to delay, we have bandied words across this floor for some time with regard to responsibility, and when the time comes I and those who are on this side of the house will be quite willing to submit our record to the electors and have them decide who is responsible for the delay and indifference in dealing with this question.

I am not going to be led away from what I was discussing, when the right hon. gentleman rose to speak, by a résumé of the whole debate which has been going on for the last two weeks. The reference which my right

[Mr. Bennett.]

hon. friend made to the instances which were given as to the way in which money was being expended was, it seemed to me, unworthy of the leader of a government who himself says they have endeavoured to see that the money reached the needy, and whose government went so far as to pass an order in council declaring that to be the purpose of the expenditure. It seems to me that anyone who could bring instances or point to cases in which it appeared likely that the policy of the government had not been carried out, should be welcomed by my right hon. friend, and that immediately a promise of investigation should be made. I do not think it lies in the mouth of my right hon. friend, or that it puts him or his government in a proper light before the country, to be so intolerant of criticism or of statements which would rather indicate that the assurances they have been given with regard to the administration of this money may not have been lived up to. It seems to me that the Prime Minister should do what my friend the Minister of Public Works did last night, that is, promise an investigation and desist from criticism of those who, notwithstanding the intolerance with which they seem to be met, feel that they should point out to this government instances in which the administration of this act has gone wrong.

Now let us get back to the point. My right hon. friend has a habit of traversing a good deal of territory when replying to a question which he feels may perhaps contain some modicum of intelligence, some grain of soundness. My suggestion to my right hon. friend was that if money was voted in the estimates no more than fifteen days would be given in which to make payment. My right hon. friend suggested that the most he could hope for under the ruling which he had was that within a reasonable time he might be able to make payments after the date for incurring obligations had expired. I pointed out again that this statute is unlimited as to time, and I submit that the Prime Minister has no precedent anywhere for any such statute. I expected that possibly he might justify this section in this way: I thought the provision might have been introduced for the purpose of allowing him to make payment now of obligations which had been incurred under the statute before the first of March. But did anyone ever imagine that my right hon. friend would embody in this statute power to make future payments for obligations incurred between now and the first of May when parliament, according to all