

Report on Municipal Labour Program

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Mr. Speaker, speaking to the point of order, I can very well understand the concern and embarrassment of the government—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I understood the hon. member for Essex East to say he was speaking to the point of order.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I was just saying, Mr. Speaker, in making my answer to the point of order, that I can well understand the embarrassment of the government when one seeks to comment on the important statement made by the Minister of Labour. The Minister of Justice, I am sure—

Mr. Speaker: Order. With all deference to the hon. member, his comments are not on the point of order. The point is how far he should go in his comment on the statement of the minister.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): With great respect, I think I was just about to do that, but I have the right to comment upon statements made by the Minister of Justice that were not all on the point of order. The Minister of Labour quite properly made a statement outlining the government's amendment to its winter work program and giving statistics respecting the unemployment situation in Canada.

Mr. Fulton: In Canada.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I was commenting on those statistics by revealing that the situation in Canada is so severe that it does not compare favourably with the unemployment situation in other countries—

Mr. Starr: On a point of order—

Mr. Martin (Essex East): —in the western world, and I submit that I was completely in order.

Mr. Speaker: There can only be one speaker at a time on the point of order.

Mr. Starr: I rise on a question of privilege.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I was perfectly in order in commenting on the statement of the Minister of Labour.

Mr. Speaker: Does the Minister of Labour have something to say on the point of order? I wish to deal with it, because it is a rather important point in our practice and I think it is well that we keep on firm and proper lines in the practice at this stage of the proceedings of the house.

Mr. Starr: I think the remarks made by the hon. member for Essex East were irrelevant, in that he compared the situation in our

country with other countries that do not have the same climatic conditions and seasonal fluctuations that Canada has; and when he does so he speaks in a tone of disappointment because he predicted last year—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Kootenay West.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): On a point of order—

Mr. Speaker: I am hearing the hon. member for Kootenay West.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I have not finished my statement.

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. member has something further to say I will hear him again, but I am now recognizing the hon. member for Kootenay West on the point of order.

Mr. H. W. Herridge (Kootenay West): I wish to trespass on the time of the house only for a moment or two to say that, strange as it may seem, I agree wholeheartedly with the contention of the Minister of Justice on this occasion. I do think that the member for Essex East is trespassing upon the good will of the house in making these lengthy statements, and I suggest that if he will follow the practice of his leader in replying to statements by the Prime Minister or other members of the government he will be even more in line with the rules as we understand them.

Mr. Speaker: Does the hon. member wish to deal further with the point of order?

Mr. Martin (Essex East): No.

Mr. Speaker: May I say this. The practice at this stage of the proceedings of the house is not capable of exact definition but as I understand it, is customary for a minister who wishes to make a statement to do so under the heading of motions on routine proceedings. It has been the practice of this house, for at least the last five or six years, for one speaker from each of the opposition parties to be allowed to comment briefly upon the statement.

It is clear, I think, to all of us that this does not open a question for debate. Of course it does not restrict the character of the comment, which may be favourable or it may be unfavourable. I think we have to depend upon the good sense and discretion of the members of the house in not going