

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, May 13, 1960

The house met at 11 a.m.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

TERMINATION OF SEASONAL BENEFITS—MOTION
FOR ADJOURNMENT UNDER STANDING ORDER 26

Mr. H. W. Herridge (Kootenay West): I wish to move, seconded by the hon. member for Vancouver East (Mr. Winch), the adjournment of the house under standing order 26 for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely the imminent termination of unemployment insurance seasonal benefits to approximately 200,000 unemployed persons, which will cause further hardship to those affected and impose an increased financial burden on hundreds of municipalities.

In proposing this motion, Mr. Speaker, I am sure there is no necessity to emphasize to the members of the house the importance of the subject with which it deals. I think on that we all agree.

In view of the termination of unemployment insurance seasonal benefits on May 15 and consequently the urgency of the question I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the answers given by the Minister of Labour (Mr. Starr) in this house to questions of members of the opposition with respect to this very important question to thousands of Canadians have created an anxiety among those persons, thousands of unemployed Canadians, that demands immediate consideration and action by this house.

Mr. Speaker: Before I make the decision which falls to the Chair, does any hon. member from either the government or the opposition wish to comment on the compliance with standing order 26 of the proposed motion?

Hon. Paul Martin (Essex East): I rise, Mr. Speaker, to support this motion put forward by the hon. gentleman who has just spoken. It is clear, under the citation to which the hon. member directed Your Honour's attention, that this is a matter of great urgency and also a question which, in consequence, creates a situation that can only be characterized by urgency of debate.

It will not be a satisfactory answer for hon. gentlemen opposite to say that during this session there has been ample opportunity to discuss this question of unemployment. The question now before us is a new situation,

one that arises because of the termination date on Monday as a result of which thousands of individuals in this country will not be able to obtain the beneficial results and consequences of the seasonal benefits.

The latest unemployment figures which were made available to us indicated that on the lowest basis 556,000 people, at a minimum, were out of work. It surely is not an overstatement to argue that the most important single domestic problem is that of unemployment, now brought into focus by the fact that these benefits are no longer to be available to a very large number of those who come within the category of men and women out of work.

We in the Liberal party therefore strongly support this proposal, and we ask for an opportunity of debating a question which arises now for the first time in this context, a question that is clearly within the citation and one that calls for solution at the hands of the government of the day. The minister has given a straightforward answer as to the government's intention in this particular, pursuant to a question that was put to him the other day. He having taken that position, we ought now to be afforded an opportunity under this procedure of giving the reasons why the stand taken by the government should be changed and why we on this side of the house should be given an opportunity of successfully resisting that stand.

Hon. Howard C. Green (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, it is very touching to hear the hon. member for Essex East (Mr. Martin) appealing for an opportunity to discuss this question. His government had the opportunity for a good many years to extend the period during which benefits would be available but they did nothing about it, and it remained for the present government to put into effect the present legislation.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must ask the minister to speak to the question of the relevancy of this motion.

Mr. Green: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Kootenay West (Mr. Herridge) and the hon. member for Essex East were able to make political speeches during the course of their observations. I hate to contravene the rules, but I do submit that I should be entitled to the same opportunity.