

Supply—Labour

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I am sure if there had to be an interruption, as obviously there had to be at this time, few happier events could present themselves to intervene in the course of this debate than the announcement just made by the Prime Minister and the words he has expressed in connection with this joyous event, supported as he was by the Leader of the Opposition.

I had said, just before we interrupted our proceedings, that since hon. gentlemen opposite had come into office the average unemployment in terms of the working force was somewhere around 6.1 per cent, the highest since 1931-35. This is to be contrasted with the unemployment level in terms of the percentage of unemployed to the working force between the years 1946 to 1957, which was 2.9 per cent.

There can be no question but that we are now face to face with a serious problem. I think I could produce no more effective evidence of the determination of the government to do something about this problem than to refer briefly to a sentence the Minister of Labour used in a recent television speech, when he spoke to the nation about unemployment. The picture he gave in that speech certainly did not truly reflect conditions as they then were, and certainly was not at all reflective of the present unemployment picture in Canada. However, the Minister of Labour did say at the middle of page 3 of the text that was given for public release:

And I want to assure that this government will use every resource at its disposal to see to it that every Canadian who is in need of a job will have a job.

I am sure that was a welcome and assuring statement to the Canadian people. I am now going to urge upon the Minister of Labour and the government that they give effect to that assurance that every resource at the disposal of the government will be used to see that every Canadian who is in need of a job will have a job.

I say that on the basis of the minister's own figures, certainly as to those who are in receipt of unemployment insurance, unless we are going to take the position that there must be some permanency in the beneficial right to this important social security measure, the government must recognize at least that number as being among those in need of jobs. I know it is not pleasant for the minister to listen to criticisms day after day about this problem. But he has his responsibilities and we have ours. We of the opposition have the responsibility of bringing home to the government the nature of the problem, outlining its severity; and to remind hon. gentlemen, as they have frequently been

reminded, of their promises to do something about this situation. We have a responsibility to give them our opinion as to the extent to which they have put forward the kind of effort which the people of Canada have a right to expect of a government in this matter.

I say the government has not put forward such an effort. The government relies mainly on the winter works program, and it is now clear that this program, while it is satisfactory in so far as it goes, does not go far enough. It is not satisfactory to the municipalities, nor is it satisfactory to some of the provinces. The hon. member for Timmins was right the other day when he complained about the attitude of the municipalities generally with regard to this program.

The Minister of Labour said, if I correctly interpreted what he did say, that no municipality had complained. However, that is not the case. I respectfully point this out to the Minister of Labour and ask him to look at his files. He will see that my own city of Windsor complained about the inadequacies of this program and urged modifications so as to make it possible for more than 143 persons in the community to be employed.

The Minister of Labour finds it irritating to hear us mention, day after day, the fact that this problem of unemployment exists. He cannot take the position, however, that there have been no constructive proposals made for dealing with this serious situation. If the government has not been able to come forward with a program, we of the Liberal opposition have, and we placed that program before this house on the last day of the debate on the speech from the throne.

What reaction to that program have we had from this government? The only comment we have had has been with regard to one of the proposals which was that this house should establish at once a parliamentary committee to assess the short term and long term consequences of unemployment in Canada.

The minister's comment last Friday was that if such a committee were established the hon. member for Essex East would use it for political purposes. That was the only comment made by the minister about our proposals to correct unemployment. I have no doubt that I would be warranted in using that committee for proper political purposes. There is nothing sinister in engaging in political controversy with hon. gentlemen on this subject. I would certainly use that committee for the purpose not only of pointing out what are the facts, but of reminding hon. gentlemen of their responsibility in this matter. But no other comment was made except the reply of the