

*Supply—Labour*

pressing for those amendments ever since the beginning of the session. We had hoped even the other day to elicit from the Minister of Labour some assurance that the government's policy with regard to these amendments would be made known before we recessed, in order that we might have an opportunity to see if these amendments would in any way bring assistance to the thousands who are out of work in our country.

I ask the Minister of Finance now to tell us what is the present state of the fund. What steps are going to be taken by the government to maintain the integrity of the fund? I ask whether or not those steps are capable of providing for an emergency, which we all hope will not eventuate, in 1959-60; but if it eventuates those steps must be such as would provide these benefits for those who have qualified as a result of their contributions as a matter of right, and not simply as a matter of relief as a result of the charitable instincts of the people of Canada.

This is a matter of the greatest importance. We have been proud, since 1941, of the Unemployment Insurance Act and of its great social consequence. We have referred with pride to the strength of the fund which now, as a result of the unemployment in our country, has reached what could be, in the absence of certain corrective measures, a dangerous point. I ask the Minister of Finance to give us an assurance with regard to this matter at the earliest moment.

**Mr. Herridge:** Before the Minister of Finance replies, although I do not wish to take too much of the time of the committee I do want to say that we in this group are interested in this question in the same way as the hon. member for Essex East is interested. We would like to hear the answers to the questions he has raised, and we agree as to the importance of this matter.

**Mr. Fleming (Eglinton):** This item relates to the cost of administration of the Unemployment Insurance Act. It has no bearing whatever on the fund. The fund is created under the act by contributions, and appears in the estimates each year as a statutory item. This item that is now before the committee has nothing to do with the financing of the fund itself at all.

My hon. friend knows quite well that the information he is asking cannot be given to the house until the legislation is introduced. I have no intention whatever of standing here today and outlining the terms of any legislation that may be introduced. The house is aware of the statement made in the speech from the throne that amendments to the act will be forthcoming. Certainly it

[Mr. Martin (Essex East).]

would be highly improper, not only inappropriate but improper, to answer the questions of the hon. member for Essex East in that regard, because this item relates purely and simply to the cost of administration of the act.

As hon. members will see on reference to the details of the estimates on page 19, it is almost entirely a matter of salaries. There are some three other items, but this additional amount required is made up very largely of the salaries of employees of the unemployment insurance commission.

**Mr. Martin (Essex East):** I am not going to press the minister to give us the details of legislation which has not been presented to the house. I did not ask for that. What I asked was whether or not the government was taking corrective steps, through these amendments, by way of further contributions to be made or further categories of employees to be included. I just wanted some indication in a general way.

I certainly do have a right and I think we have a right in this house, to ask the minister about the state of the fund. We are now asked to vote salaries and wages to the extent of \$1,762,000 for these employees in the unemployment insurance commission. If it is not proper to ask under this supplementary item as to the state of the fund, then I certainly do not understand the elementary practices and procedures of this house. My hon. friend could retort, of course, that that is evident. Surely when we have to vote salaries for the staff of the unemployment insurance commission it is proper to ask the Minister of Finance how much money now reposes in the fund, so we can gain some idea as to the state in which the fund will be in the ensuing fiscal year, 1959-60. That is the question I asked of the Minister of Finance, and I would hope he will not be reluctant to give us that information at once.

**Mr. Fleming (Eglinton):** Mr. Chairman, the statistics on the fund are issued from time to time, and no one knows that better than the hon. gentleman. They appear in the *Labour Gazette* from month to month. I do not pretend to have here any figures later than the last published figures.

I emphasize, Mr. Chairman, that the vote we are discussing has nothing whatever to do with the amount standing to the credit of the fund. Everyone knows that the fund has been drawn upon to meet unemployment; that is the purpose of the fund. My hon. friend asked me for a statement as to what measures the government proposes to take to replenish the fund. I shall have to