

Unemployment

of the government of this country was uninterested in this problem. He went on to say that at this very moment, in all probability, the Prime Minister was down at a political meeting when the fact is that the Prime Minister at this time is engaged in his own office in a matter of great importance affecting the welfare of this country.

Mr. Hees: Mr. Speaker, the 600,000 unemployed people are going to be very interested to know that the Prime Minister's own business or correspondence or whatever he happens to be dealing with is more important than listening to the representatives of the people—

Mr. Gauthier (Portneuf): Listening to your speech.

Mr. Hees: —on this important matter. The government just does not know how important this problem is. They never get out of their offices. They never get closer to the people than being guest speakers at a Canadian Club luncheon; that is their idea of really getting down and mixing with the masses. They have no idea what goes on in the minds and bodies of people who work for a living, and who are today unemployed. They have forgotten about them. They are happy in their oak panelled offices and their private cars. They do not give a hoot, and that is exemplified by the fact that the Prime Minister has refused to call a conference this year, to deal with this problem which involves 600,000 unemployed people. He knows quite well that the April conference cannot deal with anything except the agenda for the conference to be held later in the year.

Mr. Martin: My hon. friend has said the Prime Minister of this country has refused to call a conference to deal with this particular matter.

Mr. Hees: Right.

Mr. Martin: My hon. friend knows that is not the case; that is a misstatement, and my hon. friend should not repeat something he knows to be without any foundation.

Mr. Hees: That is absolute nonsense, Mr. Speaker, because the only way this present unemployment problem can be dealt with is by an immediate conference, not by a conference later in the year, the agenda of which will be arranged at the April 26 meeting. The Minister of National Health and Welfare knows quite well that that is so.

Mr. Martin: What I was objecting to was your statement that the Prime Minister refused to call such a conference.

Mr. Hees: He did.

Mr. Martin: When did the Prime Minister refuse to call such a conference?

Mr. Hees: I asked the Prime Minister on several days if he would call an immediate conference, and he said no.

Mr. Martin: When did the Prime Minister refuse to call a conference as my hon. friend just stated he did, a moment ago?

Mr. Hees: Then I shall ask the Minister of National Health and Welfare if, after a number of requests put to him to call such a conference, he has agreed to call it.

Mr. Martin: As my hon. friend knows, since he asked the question, the Prime Minister had suggested to the provinces that we meet with the provinces on April 22, and because two premiers could not come the conference has been put off until April 26. Why does my hon. friend persist in trying to convey to this country that the Prime Minister has refused to call a conference?

Mr. Hees: Because it happens to be true, and I will tell you why.

The Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Martin) knows perfectly well that this meeting on April 26 will deal with nothing but the setting of the agenda for a conference to be held later in the year. It will not deal with the present unemployment problem, and the minister knows that perfectly well. The Prime Minister knows it, and the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Health and Welfare and the rest of the cabinet are simply shilly-shallying this thing through, hoping that by the middle of May the unemployment picture will not be so grave, and that they can escape and not have to deal with the situation today.

The Minister of National Health and Welfare knows that perfectly well, and so does the Prime Minister. They know perfectly well that there will be nothing but an agenda for a later meeting dealt with at the meeting on April 26. And I challenge the minister to say if there will be anything in addition to that.

Mr. Martin: My hon. friend challenges me to say—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps I should point out to the hon. member for Broadview (Mr. Hees) that if he resumes his seat I will have to call the next speaker.

Mr. Martin: My hon. friend challenges me, and I am going to accept the challenge, if he will permit me.

Mr. Hees: So long as I do not have to sit down. I cannot sit down, because Mr. Speaker has told me not to. But I would be