

*Unemployment*

unnumbered for participation by the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) and other ministers, opportunities without number for statements of government policies, statements of government panaceas, now on the sixth day of this debate we are yet waiting to hear the very first proposal from the government to meet the problem of unemployment in Canada? It is a sad, a tragic fact. It is evidence complete of irresponsibility on the part of those who occupy the treasury benches.

The Minister of Labour (Mr. Gregg) in speaking in this debate on the first day contented himself with drawing comfort from the figures on employment. He did not at all come to grips with the problem of unemployment. He turned his back upon the incontrovertible facts that Canada must always have increasing numbers of unemployed because our population is rising and the Canadian labour force is increasing at the present time at the rate of about 6,000 per month.

We then heard from the Minister of Trade and Commerce (Mr. Howe) and we saw him content himself with a mere review of economic conditions, the sort of thing he puts out as a matter of routine at the end of each year.

Not one proposal has yet been made by the government in relation to this problem. We still await even some elementary evidence of recognition by the government of the existence of this problem. There has been no realism exhibited by this government in the course of this debate.

The seventh fact, sir, is that the government has hitherto made no preparation for a situation of this kind. Has no lesson been learned from the experience of the depression which had its beginning in 1929? Is it to be expected that the government is to be permitted to wait until an emergent situation of this kind is upon us before it begins even to think about it? Has no lesson been learned from the past?

Those who recall those days of depression would be the first to hope that there would be enough sense of responsibility, enough realism, enough ingenuity in government, regardless of its party stripe, to have given thought in advance to a situation of this kind so that when it arose measures would be ready to be put in operation to grapple with these conditions. But no preparation has been made by this government; it is a tragic fact. The situation is upon us. The situation has occurred in other sessions, though in none since the war to as alarming an extent as today. There have been ample warnings to bring about a sense of urgency to any government that had a sense of realism and sense of responsibility. It is quite apparent and

deplorably manifest now that the government has made no preparation in advance to meet the type of situation which confronts Canada today.

Having examined those unchallengeable facts, facts emerging in the course of the discussion in this house, I shall ask and attempt to answer this question, which must lie at the root of the thinking of responsible men and women in this house in regard to this problem.

What is the extent and nature of the responsibility of government in relation to a situation of this kind where we have widespread unemployment and positive suffering on the part of tens of thousands of Canadians who deserve and desire only opportunities and work?

I am of those who believe that it is a proper function of government, as far as government can, to create an economic climate within which the enterprise of individuals may flourish. That is a sound rule under all circumstances, but it does not preclude a recognition of a proper measure of governmental responsibility in an abnormal situation such as I conceive this to be. Indeed, if this were to be regarded as a normal situation I suppose the government would then be entitled to say this is a matter simply calling for a normal attitude. We of Her Majesty's official opposition do not regard a situation in which 600,000 Canadians are looking for employment as a condition which self-respecting Canadians can contemplate as normal. This to us is an abnormal situation; let us see to it that in our thinking and in our consequent policies and actions we do regard it as abnormal.

Governments in Canada have, I affirm, a measure of responsibility in an abnormal situation of this kind which they cannot shirk. I said "governments" because I recognize that there are three levels of government in Canada and I propose, sir, to face up to the question which any member who regards himself as possessing courage must face. What is the degree of responsibility of each level of government? Where does the responsibility lie in a situation of this kind, abnormal in its nature and extent, as I have affirmed?

Let us turn first of all to the municipal governments. Here I think I can claim to speak out of some lengthy experience. It is to the municipal governments that the unemployed naturally turn first. The municipal governments are always at hand and accessible. It is only natural that the unemployed turn first of all to the local government. It is an easy matter for the unemployed anywhere to go first of all to the city hall or the town hall.