

Supply—Labour

here tonight. But we in parliament have coming to us from the minister a very clear explanation of the whole matter.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lessard (Lake St. John): Mr. Chairman, now that the various parties in the house have agreed to pass this item of the supplementary estimates, in order to enable our unemployed to receive their insurance benefits, I shall only very briefly take part in this debate so as not to draw it out unduly. I just want to make a few remarks which, I think, are called for at this time. Last year the Gill commission, the cost of which was paid with public funds, submitted a report suggesting solutions for some problems among which the one we are facing tonight, that is an unemployment insurance fund without funds.

Mr. Chairman, it seems to me appropriate to stress that we did not yet see any legislation in this house to enact some recommendations in this report. Personally, I would not carry out all those recommendations, but some of them at least might have eliminated the problem before us tonight.

To my mind, Mr. Chairman, the unemployment insurance fund cannot be very long-lived considering its condition, and the rules will certainly have to be changed so that the situation which has prevailed for the past two or three years does not become permanent.

I certainly do not want the unemployment insurance benefits to be delayed because in the province of Quebec we have 173,000 unemployed at this time and in the whole of Canada almost half a million.

In my riding, more particularly with a labour force of 13,000 people, there are about 3,000 without jobs, which is almost 25 per cent.

I would hate to be one of those who would delay the carrying of these estimates, because that would delay the payment of unemployment insurance benefits to unemployed who need them badly.

My own area is very much affected by unemployment. I should like to tell the Minister of Labour (Mr. MacEachen) that the winter works program helped my area somewhat, since there are now 800 men working in my riding, a factor which eased the pressure on the fund.

However, following the ill-advised decision of the minister to shorten by a few weeks the duration of the winter works program, he will have more jobless to look after starting May 1.

That is why I am of the opinion that the Minister of Labour, following his decision to reduce the winter works period, will have to

[Mr. Knowles.]

find a new formula and to set up a new program which might be entitled summer works program, since the winter works program will be closed.

[*Text*]

Mr. Langlois: Mr. Chairman, I have one observation to make about the special sitting this evening, and it is that the press gallery seems to be more alert than some of our cabinet ministers. I know the government has a habit of taking 60 days of decision, but this time they do not have 60 days. As I mentioned once before this government has a habit of bringing things up at the last moment and getting everyone in a whirl in trying to force things through without hon. members knowing what is going on. I think the minister should have some explanation to make for our sitting tonight.

One question which comes to my mind is why his commissioners have not brought to his attention this state of affairs. The hon. member for Ontario mentioned this matter a little while ago. Everybody hoped and expected to have an Easter recess, but it appears the unemployment insurance fund would have been drained before the end of the Easter recess. I imagine the minister or his commissioners were up to date. If they were not, why not, and why was the minister not told about this? The unemployed have enough trouble trying to get work, or trying to squeeze a little money out of the government, without our having to tell them that the insurance fund is broke, a state of affairs which has resulted from the government's negligence through not voting the necessary cash. In my constituency two mines closed down a few days ago laying off 600 workers, and like the hon. member for Lake St. John I would be the last to wish these people more trouble, on top of the trouble they have already, as a result of their not being paid their unemployment dues.

Across the country there are over half a million unemployed. I was saddened to hear last night over the national network that the unemployment insurance fund was in a very critical state. Similarly this evening it was sad to hear that the house has to have a special sitting after the deadline for this fund has passed so as to vote the necessary funds in the form of a \$1 vote under this item. I hope that the government will not require other additional sittings for a similar purpose in connection with other fields, or that I shall not hear another broadcast on the national network indicating the government was not up to par on its business, having forgotten to do something of this sort.

Another matter which was raised by the hon. member for Lake St. John, a matter