

Supply

end of June or at the beginning of July, against our protests.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Baldwin: We came back for two days in September to deal with a special problem at that time. We vigorously pressed for action to provide measures for the winter unemployment which circumstances at that time indicated would occur in Canada. But we were met with the story that everything was fine, everything was good, everything was rosy.

The Minister of Finance admits having gone around the country in June. He admits he knew what the problem was. But because the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and other hon. gentlemen opposite decided to call an election, then just as with the case of the Unemployment Insurance Fund, they hid the problem and did nothing about it. You do not turn on a winter works program like you turn on the tap on a beer keg. It takes time, it takes preparation, it takes notice. I come from a part of the country where there are a great many small communities that have to struggle desperately in order to provide the budgets they need for the social amenities for the people who live in them. In order for them to take advantage of a program of this kind they require several months notice. June, Mr. Speaker, is not too early at all. I say, shame on the government for its failure, having full and adequate knowledge of the facts, to act when it had an opportunity to do so.

• (1740)

There were as of January 688,000 unemployed people in Canada. How many will there be in February? What are the government's expectations that a program of this kind will have any alleviating effect during the balance of this winter? I suggest there will be very little indeed. It is true that, hopefully, this program might have some effect next year, but I think it is a shocking and shameful thing that it is February before we become involved for the first time in attempting to provide some measure of assistance through programs of this kind to the unemployed of this country. It is obvious—it has to be obvious—that the programs that will be engaged in will have little remedial effect during the balance of this winter, and the responsibility for this lies squarely at the door of hon. members opposite. The people of this country will not lightly forget that.

There are many other areas with which I could deal. The fact that this measure could well have been brought in in the form of a bill is one. The President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury) thought it was a bill. This government has become accustomed to dealing with matters of this kind in the estimates with all the particulars, exceptions and provisos. I suggest it should have been brought in as a bill last spring or summer. An opportunity should have been given the House to send the measure to a standing committee composed of Members of Parliament with far more knowledge of the needs and requirements of the people of Canada than have my hon. friends opposite. There could then have been included as input to the bill the views and representations of constituents all over Canada.

[Mr. Baldwin.]

It is manifestly wrong to attempt to provide measures dealing with unemployment through items in the estimates. Fortunately, through our ingenuity and because of a very wise decision which was made, we now have a little better opportunity to discuss the matter than we otherwise would have had. If that were not so, there would have been some limited debate in the committee, and if the matter had been taken up at the end of the period of allotted days an item involving \$350 million would have received no debate at all. This is no way to deal with such an important measure as this.

I have so many more things to say, Mr. Speaker, but I understand that hon. members on both sides of the House want to discuss the matter so I will reserve any further comments until such time as we go into committee of the whole.

Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming): Mr. Speaker, I have often been asked whether, if a particular party were to take over the government, we would be able to do many of the things that are promised. Having watched the present Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner), I think we would have to come to the conclusion that that would not be likely. I was very surprised this afternoon when he said that what he was doing was all right because his advisers had told him so. These were the same advisers who told the previous government that it was all right to do this, and probably they also told the government before that. I am equally sure they will tell the government yet to come the same thing. It is time we took a look once more at the rules of the House so as to give Members of Parliament the chance to make some input, instead of having civil servants who do not really care about how legislation is developed as long as it is developed along their own lines provide the input.

I do not agree with the argument of the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen). Perhaps he did have to take advantage of the opportunity of putting down a notice, for the simple reason that this has been the precedent that we have recently developed. But I think the real problem with this piece of legislation is that which was outlined in the remarks of the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin). This estimate really is a bill. It has the power of a statute and it will be a statute because it will come in as another bill. It will become a statute following passage of the supplementary estimates. I say that is a lousy way of doing business; it is a terrible way to introduce legislation. This piece of legislation will be lousy legislation, and it will be bad for a number of reasons.

I totally agree that we need winter works projects. I have discussed this matter with a number of municipalities in my area and all agree they could probably scrape up some money if they could be given a long-term loan—which probably they cannot afford. If Members of Parliament would really think about supplying capital for winter works projects I am sure they would agree that there have to be certain criteria, and these cannot be outlined in supplementary estimates.

For example, let us suppose that the province of Ontario wants to use its three-year contribution of approximately \$100 million to do something at the proposed Pickering airport. It is possible that the province of Ontario will find this a very useful winter works project