

Supply—Labour

present time, the only source from which that assistance comes is the municipality or the province.

My point is this. Within a month or two, we are having a dominion-provincial conference, and surely that would be the appropriate time to discuss what can be done in sharing the costs of relief between the three levels of government. I feel very strongly, Mr. Chairman, that relief or welfare costs of that sort are not the responsibility of the various municipalities. I warn the minister of something he knows better than I do, and that is that unless the federal government is prepared to pay some part of the relief costs we are going to see hundreds of municipalities in bankruptcy again when the next depression comes. Moose Jaw had 6,000 people on relief out of 20,000 in the thirties and went bankrupt. Swift Current and Prince Albert went bankrupt. I do not want to see that happen again.

I am hoping the minister will offer some solution at the dominion-provincial conference, which would enable the federal government to help pay a part of that cost.

Mr. Mitchell: I want to say this to my hon. friend right away, that I think I know something about conditions that existed in Saskatchewan during the years he was probably at school. I do not say that disrespectfully. The finances of the province of Saskatchewan have never been better in their history; employment in Saskatchewan is as high as in any province in the Dominion of Canada at the moment. The hon. member talks as though we were standing on the brink of a precipice.

Mr. Thatcher: No; on a point of order, I am afraid of what may happen if another depression comes.

Mr. Mitchell: The trouble with people who express such opinions is that they are afraid the sun will not shine tomorrow morning. During the war I had to listen to complaints about the shortage of manpower. This government was criticized because some men had the courage to go and fight, so that freedom, as we understand it, could endure. I went through that. Ever since the end of the war, these people have been predicting such terrible times.

In my department, I have a research staff. The year before last, they predicted fairly accurately what employment conditions in the Dominion of Canada would be. They predicted fairly accurately what would happen last year, and I expect the same will be true of this year. It may be that the third time their judgment will be wrong, owing to some possible international complication; I

[Mr. Thatcher.]

do not know. I think the best way to ensure bad conditions in the country is to keep on talking about them. I shudder to think what would happen to this country, or to freedom as we understand it, if, during the war years, the people who had the responsibility which some of us bore had taken the negative position which some of my hon. friends take upon occasion. I am hopeful. I am an optimist, like the Minister of Trade and Commerce. I am not looking forward to the conditions which some people predict for this country. I have never taken that view. I take the opposite view, and I think it is a good thing that most of the Canadian people share my view.

Mr. Thatcher: Perhaps the minister did not understand me. I quite frankly admit that I am surprised that the government has done as well as it has since the war in keeping full employment. I am surprised, and I admit it. But that does not mean that we should not profit from our experience in the last depression. The various city councils are writing to the members to say they are worried about relief costs growing to a greater extent than they can afford. All I am suggesting to the minister is that we should prepare for a depression in case it does come. I hope it does not arrive. These municipal councils are worried. The minister will see a great many municipalities go bankrupt once again unless some federal source of revenue is available to help carry these relief costs.

Mr. Mitchell: Does my hon. friend know what the relief costs were in Moose Jaw last month?

Mr. Thatcher: No, I do not.

Mr. Mitchell: I thought so.

Mr. Thatcher: My city council wrote asking me to take this matter up with the minister. I am sure he does not resent it, because he knows I am doing what I was asked to do. They are quite concerned because Moose Jaw was one of the cities which did go bankrupt. It is one of the cities which is on the borderline now, and substantial relief costs would put it into bankruptcy again.

Mr. Knowles: It was my intention to make a speech on this item, but I am prepared to forgo it, providing I can protect my right to speak on matters having to do with fair wage provisions and so on, on item 144 and on some of the other items. That is all I want to say, except for one other point; I had hoped that the minister might answer some of the questions that have been asked. He will probably deal with them as we come to the items if we remind him about them.