

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, the white paper does not turn it down. The government believes that this is the direction in which we should move. I am sure the hon. member will agree that there have been very great advances, as illustrated by many of the discussions now going on with the provinces.

UNEMPLOYMENT—ESTIMATE OF JOBS TO BE PRODUCED
BY FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PLANS

Hon. George Hees (Prince Edward-Hastings): Mr. Speaker, would the Acting Prime Minister advise the House as to what the government's response was to the unanimous demand yesterday at the welfare conference by the representatives of all the provinces that the government increase the share it pays under the Canada Assistance Plan to 60 per cent or, if possible, to 65 per cent, since increased unemployment is making it impossible for the provinces and municipalities to meet relief costs?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I thought the hon. gentleman heard my answer to the question asked by his leader. Perhaps he was not listening to what his leader had to say. He asked me precisely that question and I said that the matter is under consideration.

Mr. Hees: Mr. Speaker, would the Acting Prime Minister advise the House as to what was the response of the government to the request of these ministers yesterday—it was more of a demand than a request—for the government's estimate of the number of new jobs which will be produced by the government's unemployment program during the next three months?

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday to the hon. member when he asked a similar question, there was a very substantial increase in the number of jobs in Canada in 1970.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Sharp: We expect that there will be an even greater increase in the number of jobs, mainly as a result of the measures taken by this government.

Mr. Ricard: There is to be increased unemployment. That is what the minister means.

Mr. Hees: There has been a decrease, not an increase.

UNEMPLOYMENT—GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN AT WELFARE
MINISTERS' CONFERENCE

Mr. John Lundrigan (Gander-Twillingate): Mr. Speaker, since unemployment, according to the minister's statement and the requests of the provincial ministers, is the No. 1 issue at the welfare ministers' conference, may I ask which minister has been designated as the spokesman for the government at the conference on unemployment?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the spokesman at the conference is, of course,

Inquiries of the Ministry

the Minister of National Health and Welfare. Since this is a meeting of ministers of welfare, he is speaking for the government at that conference. The whole question, of course, of what measures should be taken to meet the requests of the welfare ministers is a subject for the cabinet as a whole.

UNEMPLOYMENT—NUMBER DRAWING INSURANCE
BENEFITS

Mr. Frank Howard (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, may I direct a supplementary question to the Acting Prime Minister about the government's unemployment program. Has he received reports showing that the total number of people unemployed and drawing unemployment insurance benefits now stands at 756,000?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): I cannot vouch for the accuracy of the figure, but I do know that the figure of those receiving unemployment benefits, which indicates the great improvement that has been made in this plan over the years and which is so useful to those who are out of work today, is of the order the hon. member has mentioned.

Mr. Howard (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, inasmuch as that figure is of the order I have mentioned, and since it appears to be an integral part of the government's program to increase unemployment, I wonder whether unemployment has yet reached a satisfactory figure in the minister's opinion.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Is the hon. member for Hamilton West rising on a supplementary?

Mr. Alexander: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

UNEMPLOYMENT—IMMEDIATE AMENDMENT OF UNEM-
PLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT IN VIEW OF INCREASE
IN FUND

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West): As the unemployment insurance fund has increased from \$454 million in September, 1970, to \$473 million in December, 1970 and is steadily increasing, indicating that the unemployed either cannot qualify or have exhausted their benefits, a situation that is unbelievable and unacceptable particularly to the more than 500,000 people out of work, will the Acting Prime Minister now accept our advice and bring in the much-needed reforms regarding unemployment insurance?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): As I said yesterday, Mr. Speaker, the government has a firm timetable. It is not going to be deterred by attacks made upon the plan here or elsewhere. We intend to bring this legislation forward. I think it will be a very great improvement.

Mr. Alexander: Will the minister kindly advise what I should tell the 538,000 now out of work? Are they to eat cake?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.