

Supply—Labour

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I am going to say to the hon. member for Brome-Missisquoi, for whom I have very great affection even though I cannot fully appreciate his misguided political judgment, that if I used the word "lightly" I would not want any one to form the impression that the hon. member does not regard this problem as a serious one. I think in fairness to the hon. gentleman I should say that. But having said that I hope the hon. member will follow my remarks carefully and see whether he cannot revise what I regret to say are obviously distorted opinions.

I was suggesting that the government should do what the government did in 1936; go out and select an outstanding Canadian citizen with knowledge of the problems of employment and production, and assign him the task that was assigned by the Mackenzie King administration in 1936 to the late Mr. Arthur Purvis and which led to the publication of the report which I hold in my hand. This report served as a basis for some of the corrective action which was taken with regard to the problem of unemployment which existed at that time, a few months after that administration had come into office following a period of Canada's greatest unemployment under a regime that was directed by hon. members who belonged to the party now in power. I suggest that there are individuals in this country in industry who would command the confidence of the nation as a whole, and who could supply much of the dynamism which is obviously needed in trying to correct this problem.

We also proposed that there should be a modification of the winter works program to make it more acceptable. It is not good enough to be able to say that this year we hope to put 40,000 people to work. Employment for 40,000 people in the face of this problem is no real contribution at all. I am sure that if we had a committee and could examine the officials we might easily establish that this program was not responsible for putting even that many to work, and that many of these projects would have been undertaken in any event by the municipal governments.

Then we also proposed that the government should concentrate its attention on the surplus labour areas to assess the economic factors obtaining there and establish methods of providing work in those areas. If any hon. member will examine carefully the tables showing the continuous character of these surplus areas he will see that some of the great cities and towns of our country year after year find themselves in the position of being surplus areas. My own city

[Mr. Chevrier.]

happens to be one of them. The city of Cornwall is another. There are also the cities of Levis, Moncton and Bathurst. I am sure there was nothing in the statement of the governor of the Bank of Canada which would preclude the government taking extraordinary measures in those particular localities and others like them in an attempt to relieve unemployment; or are we going to say we cannot tackle the problem?

If we take that position I would remind this committee of the temper of the people of this country at the end of the war, when everyone thought the preservation of our free society depended in large measure upon our capacity not only to give social and economic satisfaction generally but to do something about unemployment. If we do not do something about this problem our system will suffer, and in my judgment it will deserve to suffer in those circumstances. But I believe our system can correct the situation. One field in which this kind of action could be taken is in regard to the surplus labour areas.

We also urged that there should be an intensification of the vocational training program. I pointed out the other day that the chairman of the unemployment insurance commission said that in his experience only one person in ten could qualify for the jobs that were being made available. If that is true, then the government cannot be proud of the extent of the vocational training program it is undertaking.

We made another proposal. Since the highest level of unemployment in Canada is to be found in the Atlantic provinces, steps should be taken to meet that situation. I proposed, as the Conservative party proposed in 1958, that an Atlantic provinces capital assistance fund be established in order to finance large projects essential to sound economic development.

I do not say that one would want to assert infallibility with regard to those proposals. We believe in them; we believe these are the minimum efforts this administration should make with regard to these matters, but in a matter of this sort we are entitled to receive from the government a firm reply on each of these proposals. Either the government recognizes them to be valid or it takes the position that they are impractical. If that is the position, it is a fair position to take. We could then engage on the issue which the government in that event would establish. But the government cannot hope to have this item passed unless it takes the committee into its confidence and gives us an indication of what it proposes to do, what its attitude is with regard to these matters.