

Supply—Labour

Let no one minimize the seriousness of this problem. The unemployment figures as revealed yesterday represent 7.3 per cent of the labour force as is stated in the release which bears the imprimatur of the minister. That figure compared with 5.3 per cent of the labour force out of work in the United States and with less than 3 per cent in the United Kingdom indicates how serious our problem continues to be. We asked last June, July and August what we are now asking the minister today, to state the government's policy so we could anticipate along with it the kind of situation which we feared would eventuate. We are now saying to the minister that on May 21, the indices indicate that we will have a serious problem of unemployment next fall and next winter. We hope it will not be as severe as during the two previous corresponding periods, but it is going to be a problem of some seriousness. Will the government not now announce its policy, giving the municipalities sufficient advance notice so they can prepare their budgets? Will the government not now, through the Minister of Labour, also indicate whether the program will be extended so as to include such factors as supplies and thereby enable many communities such as my own community, thus far not having participated in this scheme, to have an opportunity of so doing.

The minister has won the respect of hon. members of this committee. I say to the Minister of Labour in the friendliest manner that if he would accede to this request he would find that he would cause his estimates to be disposed of rapidly and would give the country and parliament some sense of satisfaction in knowing that this government, a government that made so many promises in this field, is at long last prepared to take strenuous and vigorous steps toward easing unemployment.

Mr. Winch: Mr. Chairman, I should also like to speak to the Minister of Labour in a very friendly manner. I fully appreciate all that was said by the previous speaker in asking for a pronouncement from the Minister of Labour on the plans of the government for this summer, this fall and this winter to meet the problem of unemployment. There is no question whatever but that this is a reasonable request to which the minister should accede. I support all that was said by the hon. member for Essex East and endorse the questions he asked but I believe there is a problem of an even more immediate nature. We should have from the minister a statement concerning the government's

present position, policy and plans for those who may not have food on the table this week of which there must now be thousands because of the fact that the supplementary or seasonal period for unemployment insurance has expired.

I recognize the truth of what the minister said in answer to a question a few moments ago. I appreciate all that the government has done in terms of extending on two occasions the seasonal or supplementary benefit period for unemployment insurance. That is all to the good. We congratulated the minister before on having done this and if he wishes more congratulations we will extend them to him at this time. However, the good work and good policies of the past mean nothing at all if no provision is made for a situation that may develop this week. The extension of the period to a certain date this month, excellent as it is, is not going to put ham and eggs or oatmeal on the breakfast table of hungry Canadians tomorrow.

In view of all the questions raised in the past and again today it is obvious that the government gave no consideration whatever to what would happen to the thousands across Canada on seasonal or supplementary benefits when the period was closed off. When thousands are cut off from receiving unemployment insurance benefits on one day it is not to be assumed that there are thousands of jobs waiting to be filled by them. What is the planning and thinking of the minister and the government in this respect?

It is now common knowledge that there was no planning or interest on the part of the government in the thousands of Canadians who were cut off. They were on their own unless they were prepared to go through the procedure of making application for receipt of social welfare or what is commonly known as relief. Hon. members of this committee are perfectly in order in raising questions such as those raised today by the hon. member for Essex East. These reasonable questions have been put to the government in emphatic terms on many occasions and are deserving of honest answers. But of even more importance is that the government inform us through the minister what the government's policy is for those who are not only unemployed but not in receipt of seasonal or supplementary unemployment insurance payments.

It is easy to speak in platitudes and generalities about what has been done in the past but that does not feed, clothe or shelter those who in the past two days have been denied any further assistance under the