

Employment

Speaker. We will have to do so. Canada cannot afford to again lose some 100,000 or 200,000 jobs under the present circumstances. This is the question which the government, after consideration, will have to answer. The Minister of Employment and Immigration cannot assure us that because of his programs, factories will not shut down, which hurts us as it does thousands of Canadians, but government members remain indifferent to those who are now suffering. I say again that such behaviour is typical of a callous government. I cannot over-emphasize that the Canadian people be acquainted with and denounce such inaction on the part of the government in such tragic circumstances. Last year, there were over 8,000 bankruptcies in Canada of which 40 per cent were in Quebec. In June, 1981, there were some 300,000 unemployed in Quebec.

In the month of December, 347,000 Quebecers were unemployed. Naturally some Quebec members will hold the provincial government responsible for that because there is no love lost between them. Here in Ottawa, they blame the United States or they say our plants are not quite as technologically advanced as are some others. Indeed, that is precisely what the previous speaker illustrated earlier when he said that certain countries did manage to upgrade their industry while we fell somewhat short of the mark. He showed that the government has failed to act and provide enough funds to spur research with a view to protecting our traditional sectors. The fact remains that if they had been more perceptive, they would have used those funds to revamp and modernize the industrial sector. The minister said that nobody had come up with constructive suggestions. To enlighten the minister, I would say that yesterday Quebec proposed a \$200 million plan and urged the federal government to assume 75 per cent of the costs. This was to launch an immediate revival so as to avoid—I am not too sure how I should put this—asking this government to take this opportunity to help one of the Canadian provinces which is more seriously affected because of its unemployment rate and to put an end to the series of plant closures. A \$200 million plan. That is what we are asking the government, and we have shown that if they had taken our advice and offered preferential interest rates to home owners the construction industry would be booming. The government did not want to have anything to do with that and we can see the results today. Thousands of housing units are not being built, so thousands of kitchen and bedroom sets as well as TV sets and refrigerators remain unsold throughout Canada.

The death of the construction industry has been costly in terms of unemployment and destructive at the economic level. Those are measures we had been advocating for quite some time. The minister just does not know which way to turn because the government has lost all its initiative. It does have a few programs which are nothing more than camouflaged unemployment insurance schemes. The government is finding out that our neighbours are putting up such a fierce competition that we have fallen behind and that we have a long way to go before we can catch up and provide the funds and implement the policies which will keep our industry afloat. Today, we would like to hold out our hand to those hon. members and tell them

that we forgive them their incompetence and failure. Canadians need a government that is clear-sighted enough to help them solve their problems. Canadians want to work. The fact is that 40 per cent of all the unemployed today are 18 to 25 years old, and this is a serious threat to our social climate, for indeed those young people were in a sense betrayed after having been promised a bright future provided they carry on with their studies, and now they find themselves without jobs.

Under those circumstances, there is no doubt that it is our duty as the official opposition to call for emergency measures, to blame a government that has failed so completely in that respect. I could not miss this opportunity of reminding this government that an emergency plan is a must, that we can no longer tolerate plant closures at the rate which prevailed in 1981; besides, none of the programs introduced by the Minister of Employment and Immigration nor any of the budget proposals will ever bring about a solution to the problem in the near future. I am sure all hon. members opposite are fully aware of it. I have no doubt that those programs were well-meant, but I say that they will not solve, certainly not in the short run, our present difficulties. That is why, Mr. Speaker, I join the hon. members on this side of the House in trying to stir up a sense of responsibility in the government members. I trust we will also manage to prompt the responsible ministers into taking positive action in order to meet the requests of the provinces. There has been talk of greater consultation with the unions, with businessmen and with the provinces and that it is a necessity. Of course the minister has replied that they were willing to have discussions with the provinces.

• (1700)

Again yesterday, at the federal-provincial conference, the provinces asked for and insisted on that type of negotiation, of co-operation with the federal government, in connection with the serious situation which now prevails. But once again the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) has turned a deaf ear. We know full well, as all Canadians must also, that this government has now proven that during the forthcoming six months it will not budge an inch with regard to the philosophy which has led it and is now leading the country to bankruptcy. We hope that by speaking on behalf of so many Canadians who have had more than their fair share of worry and suffering, we shall be able to convince the Minister of Finance that he should formulate far more practical proposals and develop an economic philosophy that recognizes the needs of the Canadian people whom we all represent here in this House. In view of the gravity of the situation, I hope that today the government members will be shamed into taking some kind of action. It is useless to work on their sense of pride, since they have no pride.

If I were the Minister of Employment and Immigration, I should have been ashamed to rise in this House today, to try to convince the Canadian people that I was able to provide a solution, while I was in fact only continuing the policies of my predecessors who put Canada in the mess it is in today. I should have been ashamed to say like other members that it