

*Government Organization Act, Atlantic Canada, 1987*

of the House, speaking out for the region of Atlantic Canada, they get told that they have no right to do so. That is not good enough for this Party. It is not good enough for Canada. It is not good enough for any part of Canada. It certainly will not be accepted by Atlantic Canada, Atlantic Canadians and Newfoundlanders.

We heard the previous speaker from the government side talk about spending money, which has not solved the problem, and that this will not work and that that will not work. What is happening is that the situation in Atlantic Canada is not getting better. It is either getting worse or standing still.

There was a recent presentation to the Standing Committee on Finance which dealt with the issue of interest rates in Canada. A political science professor from the University of Ottawa, Duncan Campbell, said that the unemployment rate in the regions of Canada is higher now than it was just prior to the 1981-82 recession. We have gone through a recession, an economic downturn which affected all of Canada, and we have what appears to be a recovery in certain parts of Ontario. It has been so much of a recovery that the Bank of Canada is afraid to cut the interest rates because it does not want it to overheat the economy and cause inflation in certain parts of Ontario. However, in Atlantic Canada and the regions the unemployment rate is now worse than it was before the recession.

The Hon. Member said further that in Atlantic Canada, even though we have the highest unemployment rate in the country, 50 per cent of those who are working part time are doing so because they cannot find full-time employment. Yet they are considered employed in the unemployment statistics. They are part-time employees, many of them. Those who are part-time are not part-time because they choose to be so. They are part-time because they cannot get full-time jobs.

Speaking of the unemployment rate, I want to remind Members of the House that the unemployment rate in my own Province of Newfoundland in March was 17.8 per cent. That was more than double the national rate in Canada of 7.8 per cent. That is the place that Newfoundlanders have in terms of opportunities for jobs in Canada.

When we look at the unemployment rate in Atlantic Canada and in Newfoundland we see that over the last number of years the situation has not much changed. In fact, it has got worse. In 1976, it was at 13.4 per cent and hovered around 15 per cent and 16 per cent up until early 1980. It was down to 13 per cent in 1980 and 1981. In 1982, it started going up. It was 16.8 per cent in 1982. In 1983, it was 18.9 per cent. In 1984, when the Government came in, we hit 20 per cent. In 1985, it was 21 per cent. In 1986, it was 20 per cent. We are now down to 17.8 per cent. However, we are still over double the national average. Not only have we fared poorly and are worse off now than we were before the recession, we are also at still more than twice the national average in Canada.

That is the situation. It has to be addressed by a very serious attack on regional development. We now have a Bill before us.

I want to commend the Chairman of the legislative committee, for when we travelled through Atlantic Canada and heard briefs, the Hon. Member from Fredericton held open airs and was very kind and polite. He listened to all the things that were said. Unfortunately, in the end, the Government was not prepared to accept motions that would insist that this agency take on regional development as a goal with the reduction of regional disparity as a commitment and an objective.

We have a refusal to establish this as an objective. We have assistance for small and medium-sized business in the Atlantic region. That is a laudable activity to undertake.

As even the government spokesman today mentioned, spending money will not solve the problem. He did not have the courage to say what needs to be undertaken. We have to tell Ministers of the Crown to stop talking about Atlantic Canada as if it were a basket case that needed to be kicked like a can in the hopes that that will do something to improve things. We have to recognize that Atlantic Canadians, whether they be from a metropolitan area such as Halifax or even St. John's, deserve to have the same kind of opportunity as other Canadians, opportunities for a decent job, to be able to raise their families in the place of their birth, and to be able to develop their communities and live in them.

That will have to be done by all Members of the House recognizing it as a priority. If we do not do that, we are giving up on the regions of Canada. To spend what this Government has allocated toward this particular agency and suggest that this is going to solve the problem, or is even a serious attempt to solve the problem, is an act of sheer dishonesty.

What we now have to recognize as the most serious economic problem in the country is uneven regional growth. We have to recognize that in order to tackle that problem we are going to have to take serious measures. They cannot be just spending money. They will have to involve certain structural changes. We have to do something to reverse the unlimited and unrelenting concentration of money, of jobs and of opportunities in the central parts of this country. We have to do that by structuring our economy in such a way that jobs are spread out across the country.

We have gone some way in attempting at least to redistribute income from the wealthy to the poor. We recognize at least that we have an obligation to do that. We recognize that we have an obligation to keep people in decent housing. We recognize that we have an obligation to ensure that they do not starve, and that we are prepared to redistribute income from the tax system to do that. There has to be a redistribution in Canada across the regions in terms of opportunities for work and opportunities for jobs.

● (1600)

There are numerous ways in which this can be done. I will not lay out a total economic program at the present time. There hardly seems any point in telling the Government how it should behave in terms of regional development in view of the