

*Supply*

In my province of Prince Edward Island, the unemployment rate is 17.1 per cent. Since I was elected to Parliament in 1988, I have never known a time when so many people have talked to me about the employment situation. They are people who are looking for jobs, or if they have a job they are concerned that they may lose it.

I have never had so many young people come into my office looking for employment. It is a tragedy that approximately 400,000 young people are unemployed in this country. As I stated, it is not only young people. People from many age groups are really suffering.

Every weekend when I return to my constituency, I talk to people of all ages who are feeling stressed out with the anguish of not being able to properly provide for their families' needs. They are feeling the stress of trying to make the mortgage payments or the rent payments, the car payments, put food on the table and to clothe their families adequately. The statistics that I referred to really do not show the whole story. They show the unemployment rate, but that does not include an estimated 99,000 jobless Canadians who have given up finding work. Half of that 99,000 are between the ages of 25 and 44 and almost one-third are from Atlantic Canada. Those 99,000 are people who are also looking for hope. They are people who have given up on this government. They have lost faith in this government's ability to do anything about the economy.

• (1550)

Certainly one of the best ways to get these individuals back on their feet is by calling an election and bringing in a new government to deal with these issues from a fresh perspective.

There was a recent Angus Reid-Southam News poll that provided some evidence on the need for an election. This poll indicated that Canadians believed by almost a two to one margin, and that is a large margin, that the Liberals are best equipped to deal with the economy.

I think it is safe to say that if we had an election today, the election of a Liberal government would immediately pay dividends in rekindling consumer confidence and reinstating economic growth in Canada.

It is very interesting to note that the same poll showed almost the identical two to one margin of confidence in

the Liberals' ability to handle the national unity problems.

The Prime Minister has in recent days hinted at the possible need to hold a national referendum. Certainly our party has been advocating that approach for some time, so it is with pleasure that we recognize and we welcome the Prime Minister's comments. Canadians want to have a say in our constitutional future. In fact, a recent Gallop poll indicated that 62 per cent of Canadians favour a national referendum on any reforms that would amend the Constitution. In Atlantic Canada three out of four easterners are in favour of a referendum and only 6 per cent are opposed.

To have a referendum today with the government at 16 per cent in the polls, with the Canadian economy mired in a recession, with the lack of confidence that the public have in this Prime Minister and this government, it would not be easy to ensure that Canadians vote for a renewed Canada rather than against this Prime Minister and government. There is a danger that the public may be inclined to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the Tory government by voting against the referendum.

The best way for this government to ensure that this does not take place is to call an election. Let the people decide who they want to lead this constitutional battle.

I know that my time is getting short so I simply want to sum up by stating that Canadians are disenchanted. The once buoyant, the always reserved Canadian confidence appears to be diminishing. Many Canadians, as I have stated, have given up on finding a job or they are really worried about the job that they have because they may be laid off.

We need a new government that can rekindle our pride and rebuild our confidence in ourselves. We need a Prime Minister who people do not regard as a source of distrust but as a source of inspiration.

Our country is going through some very difficult times in our history. We have pulled together through difficult times in the past and I am confident we can do it again.

The problems before us today are very great indeed and the efforts and participation of all Canadians will be needed. It is essential that the leadership of our country have the respect, the support and the ability to motivate Canadians. The present government does not have that respect and support.