

Regional Unemployment

● (1730)

The exercise in which the two levels of government have engaged, particularly since the conclusion of general development agreements in almost every province, should not be limited to a calculation in dollars and cents per capita. The outlook which inspired the signature of the agreements requires much more flexibility and humanism from the parties involved.

I, for one, am satisfied with the fact that the present minister is well aware of the importance of this openness of mind, of the search for a compromise, and I hope his provincial colleagues will follow his example. For instance, why does the government of New Brunswick still refuse to recognize the necessity of an overall plan, a comprehensive attack, in a small province such as New Brunswick which has some 660,000 inhabitants?

I was listening a moment ago to the hon. member for Halifax (Mr. Stanfield), former leader of the official opposition, who said it was sometimes necessary, if not always, to adopt a piecemeal approach in regional development, that is to say, to deal first with large urban centres so that the effects of advantages that can be obtained there will gradually be felt in rural areas. That is not what happened in New Brunswick, Mr. Speaker. Under the guise of a planning policy of urban centres growth poles, an exodus from rural areas in New Brunswick took place. The population growth in the area I represent has been almost nil since the 1971 census. Yet, the people of my region want to work and they go wherever they have opportunities, in New Brunswick, in Quebec, in Ontario and often in the United States.

I repeat what I just said: I suggest that in a province such as New Brunswick, unless we have a comprehensive plan, an overall approach covering the entire province, we will not be able to fight efficiently against regional disparities in these provinces.

I agree that the hon. member for Halifax is probably right in saying that our overall strategy should not be restricted to the provinces and that we must concentrate our efforts on a regional basis. I am of the opinion that the Council of Maritime Premiers, insofar as Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick are concerned, is indeed the most appropriate instrument with which to formulate this regional strategy. Why has the New Brunswick government for almost seven years concentrated most of its investments in the south of the province while DREE, under its industrial incentives program, its FRED program, was making an outstanding effort to meet all the demands, especially in the north.

Up to now the various development agreements have been quite discriminatory against several areas in New Brunswick, and that is not by sheer accident, precisely where the highest unemployment rates are to be found. How come people are now saying in New Brunswick that there is a provincial government for the south and a federal government for the north? In my opinion, it is the symptom of a major weakness in the development policies of the provincial government. I am aware that the Minister of Economic Regional Expansion has

[Mr. Corbin.]

been making worthy efforts lately, if not during the past months, to try and correct this discrepancy and urge the provincial government to see to it that all areas in the province benefit from federal assistance. It will soon be nine years since I came here, Mr. Speaker, and all that time I have supported the government which often heeds my criticism that I mean to be constructive. I am proud to support my government and to have been associated with men like Jean Marchand and the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Jamieson). The present minister spent two days in my region last fall to hear the municipalities, the regional development commissions and leaders in general. All those people unanimously agree that the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Lessard) has his heart in the right place and understands very well regional aspirations.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I say once again that I regret we had so little time, such short notice, to prepare adequately for the debate on today's motion which hit us somewhat unexpectedly. I find this regrettable, because we have or would have had so many things to contribute to this debate, we would have so many positive recommendations to make, but because of our other duties elsewhere in these premises, we find it impossible to accomplish as much as we would like to. In conclusion, I want personally to congratulate once again the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion, to urge him forward and encourage him to always seek with his provincial counterparts those compromises which are so hard to arrive at.

Mr. Roch La Salle (Joliette): Mr. Speaker, I am also pleased to take part in this allotted day debate on an issue of concern to all members of the House. According to the provincial speaker, there is no doubt that the government is quite satisfied with its efforts and its attitude—

Some hon. Member: True!

Mr. La Salle: Surely some members opposite will say it is true. The minister was more honest. He said that he was not satisfied with the situation. I think that we will understand each other. Is there need to recall the statements made by government representatives at the time when that department was established and was supposed, mind you, to settle practically all economic problems at the regional level. Some efforts were undoubtedly made. The results prompt us today as members of the opposition to remind the government of the problems still facing the Canadian people.

And I recently heard and carefully listened to the statements made by the minister in Montreal or elsewhere which contained the best of intentions. Every opposition member agrees with those intentions, but asks that action be taken. Everyone will readily say that it is perhaps too late to talk about those intentions and the funds supposedly available to remedy the situation.

I come from a province that the minister knows well and I wish him of course every success in his new responsibilities, but I think that Quebecers could benefit from any measure the minister might take to improve the critical situation now