

Borrowing Authority

We hear talk about one million Canadians being unemployed. Most of these people would love to have a job. They would love to work and be part of the productivity of Canada. However, they do not have the opportunity to do so, largely because this government is not keeping step with the economy as it moves along. As a result, our competitive edge in world markets is declining. Our productivity is declining and jobs are evaporating on a daily basis, and with those jobs go the hopes of many Canadians.

I have been attached to the school system in a variety of ways over the years. I am not pleased with the attitude of our youngsters who are graduating from vocational and technical schools of one kind or another. There simply are not jobs for them. It is a very serious situation.

When discussing unemployment in this House, we often do so in terms of percentage points, 8 per cent, 10 per cent or 25 per cent, or in terms of absolute numbers such as 987,000 or 1.4 million people out of work. It is very easy to speak of unemployment in those terms. What about the social side of the unemployment equation?

An hon. Member: The human cost.

Mr. Riis: Yes, what about the human costs of unemployment in this country? Studies in Ontario indicate that in 80 per cent of families experiencing wife beating, it can be related directly to unemployment. The increasing phenomena of child beating is related to unemployment, as is a percentage of suicides and the number of those entering our mental institutions. A certain percentage of alcoholism problems and family breakdowns can be attributed directly to the increasing unemployment in this and other countries.

No one will say it is a causal relationship, but when measuring the costs of unemployment we must measure more than the unemployment insurance cost and the cost of welfare. We should start measuring the costs of alcoholism, family breakdown and hospitalization of those with a variety of ailments, including those in mental institutions. We simply cannot afford to ignore these costs any longer.

What is the cost of unemployment in terms of young people being caught up in the lack of opportunities for Canada's future? Cynicism is growing among our young people today. That will not do any good for this country. It is not news that there are serious problems in Canada. We are well aware of the serious ailments in various sectors of our society. Members have offered a variety of solutions.

One approach suggested by the hon. member for Broadview-Greenwood (Mr. Rae) a number of months ago bears repeating. As financial spokesman for the NDP, he said it is time that we in Canada clearly differentiate between two kinds of government spending. With all due respect to my colleagues on the right, they seem to have a blind obsession with the deficit, that the ideal is to balance the books and have no deficit at all. While that may be a fine ideal, it is not an acceptable approach. It is too simplistic. It is not in tune with the financial world of the eighties and nineties. Perhaps to give

them credit, steps must be taken to reduce the deficit in Canada.

We must begin to reduce government spending in a variety of areas. I suspect we could lop off hundreds of millions of dollars in a variety of areas and no one in Canada would notice. Some time ago members received notice that a game was available which they could send to their constituents. The motivation was good. The game was to introduce young Canadians to the fact that this is not the only country in the world with two official languages. Others have many more than we do. However, spending millions of dollars on that project at this time makes one wonder whether that is wise government spending.

One could identify some of the big errors such as Mirabel airport. It is an obvious white elephant that must be an embarrassment to the government. The motivation may have been correct, but it was an error. The guaranteeing of massive loans to firms like Chrysler, is an error, again recognizing positive motivation, but surely when we have seen the mismanagement associated with Chrysler, the irrational structure of that industry, to simply shore that up as a simplistic way of achieving any resolution to our serious economic problems in Canada is rather irresponsible government spending, I would suggest. One looks at many of the dollars spent in parts of Canada on DREE projects, and I do not wish to criticize DREE per se because the motivation is a positive one and people are obviously trying to improve the situation. What is often created are vast sums of money going into provinces, mainly in central and eastern Canada, resulting in economic enterprises which are not viable, rational and economic enterprises, but they do create jobs in their artificial way. They give the illusion of a sound economy. They give to the people of the communities in which they are located the sense that indeed the economy is emerging and is growing.

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After looking at these jobs we find they are created in an extremely artificial and forced way. There is also the question of how long they last? They keep people's interest, they keep their hopes up often only to have them dashed later because a project cannot maintain itself in any realistic way at all.

Then there is the government spending on the constitutional proposal, and hopefully the government will not foolishly spend taxpayers' money in an effort to propagandize one party's position on this very crucial matter. If they do, again we will have to say that is not the responsible way to be spending the budget of Canada.

If one goes back, we recognize that the government spends money in two ways. One is government spending, often irrational but sometimes, however, necessary. We are committed to medicare, we are committed to paying pensions, we are committed to a variety of areas to maintain the basic services and quality of Canadian life. Perhaps there are a number of other health areas, more assistance to seniors and so on, which would be appropriate in the 1980s. Let us also recognize that there is government investment.