

looking at as a Parliament in terms of trying to improve the situation here at home.

Also in terms of training, I look at the record in this country in terms of employment equity. We are looking at the review of that very shortly. I do not think the government program in terms of providing more job opportunities for women, the minorities, the visible minorities, aboriginal people, and disabled people has been a good one.

We passed an employment equity bill in 1985 or 1986. It was a voluntary bill that coaxes and cajoles the federally regulated companies to employ more minorities and more women. That has not worked. There are many countries around the world that make their employment equity programs more mandatory and that have targets that are enforceable. In those countries the programs tend to work but in this country it is not working.

We are also failing when we look at jobs for older workers. The older workers in this country are often the people who are discriminated against. They are not getting the proper breaks that they should be getting.

• (1230)

For a modern industrialized country, I believe the illiteracy rate is one of the national disgraces of Canada. The further east one goes towards Atlantic Canada, the higher the illiteracy rate. I think a lot of the reasons for that ties in with the lack of economic opportunities and economic possibilities which exist in other parts of Canada.

In Newfoundland we find the unemployment rate is officially at 17 or 18 per cent. One sees in many parts of Newfoundland a real illiteracy rate of around 40 per cent or more. I think that is a very sad commentary on something that is lacking in Canada.

If you look again the Economic Council report, Mr. Speaker, you will notice that one thing they are commenting on in terms of failure of the government policy over the last 20 years is the area of regional disparities.

I remember very well, back in 1968, when Pierre Trudeau campaigned across this country. He campaigned on the idea of a just society, where there would be more opportunities for people in outlying areas of this country.

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I remember him introducing in the House a structural change in creating a Department of Regional Economic Expansion, or DREE, later changed to DRIE.

But if you look at the Economic Council report on page 34, they point out that over those 20 years, despite the money we spent on regional expansion and regional disparities and the targeting of certain areas by governments over the years, there has been no real decline in this country in regional disparities. The difference in the unemployment rate between the parts of Canada doing the best and the parts doing the worst has not changed in any significant way in the last 20 years.

There is something fundamentally wrong, as Judith Maxwell says, with the way we organize our economy in Canada, when despite the lip service and the money we are providing to parts of this country, such as Newfoundland, many parts of Atlantic Canada, many parts of Quebec, northern Ontario and parts of the west, these mandate programs have made no real change in the narrowing of the gap between the haves and the have nots. Again, I think that says a lot about the need to have some significant change in this country.

Another thing that strikes me—the Economic Council has not been timid to mention this as well—is that we have problems with the economic structure *per se* in this country. When the government tries to remedy some of the problems it will make the worst situation in many other parts of the country. I refer to a recent example of the monetary policy of the Government of Canada.

The government saw a highly overheated economy in southern Ontario. The housing market was going through the sky, the economy was going very well, the unemployment rate was down. So they brought in a monetary policy to allow the bank rate to escalate to where it was more than 5 per cent higher than the bank rate in the United States.

Where does it have the most negative effect, Mr. Speaker? It has the most negative effect on the parts of this country that are the least advantaged economically, such as Saskatchewan where its farm population is barely making a living. It is one of the first parts of the country to suffer from a high interest rate policy. The small business community for which the minister is responsible, particularly in the prairies, the Gaspé of Quebec, or