

Government Orders

will hear me talk on very often because it is one that needs to be rejected at every possible opportunity.

• (1215)

As I think I said in this House on Thursday, there are more native born people from my province living outside the province today than living inside. That is the best indication I can give that they are there where the labour activity and economic activity is.

Transfer payments do something else, have traditionally done so, and continue to do so. They help to stabilize the economic situation in the seven provinces which are recipients of equalization. Surely it is the goal in the Canadian national interest to ensure that each of the provinces no matter how poor—poor in the context of fiscal yardsticks, certainly not poor in terms of human resources but poor in the first context—each province in the confederation, each of the 10 provinces and territories, is in an economically stable situation.

It is easy to support Bill C-3. I invite members of the House on all sides not to confuse this debate with some other axes they want to grind later. This is a good bill. It brings them certainly to the old issue of transfer payments and it introduces a rate of growth of around 5 per cent. That is legitimate in the context of the demands of those particular provinces.

I would hope that in this debate we would put our other axes which we have to grind aside and focus on the merit which is contained in the bill and give it the support of the entire House if possible.

Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Burin—St. George's for his remarks. I know him by name. I have known him for a number of years but I can never remember the riding, which is why I am not Speaker, and unlike the hon. member was not even qualified to run for the post. We all know about the hon. member's legendary memory for the ridings and details of the ridings of every single member in this House.

I want to ask a question of the member, maybe a little off the topic of his remarks, but I think would nevertheless be interesting for the House. He spoke about some of the economic problems that Newfoundland experienced after Confederation, some of the unfavourable restructuring of the Newfoundland economy that occurred, in his view, because of Confederation.

He has talked about some of the benefits of Confederation, obviously this particular program which I reiterate we support the principle of, equalization and the benefits of transfers. He

talked about the benefits of the mobility of the Newfoundland work force leaving the province.

I think he would agree that if we look at the sum of that it is not a pretty picture, the loss of economic capacity in exchange for out-migration and transfer payments.

I wonder if that is really how he would characterize Newfoundland's experience in Confederation. Whether he would or would not characterize it that way, would he share with us some of the options he sees for Newfoundland in terms of a greater economic participation in Confederation and what alternatives there are to long run dependence on programs like equalization or on developments like out-migration of population.

• (1220)

Mr. Simmons: Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Calgary West. I would not characterize it that way. That is not the tradeoff at all.

The point I was wanting to make at the beginning of my few remarks was with regard to those who talk condescendingly about transfer payments, as though somehow we are helping those poor people down there who are trying to keep body and soul together. I do not subscribe to that notion. I am saying that part of the tradeoff that we entered into in 1949 was the one that I described. In the interest of time I will not repeat that.

I want to come to the second part of the member's question about what opportunities I see. One does not need to be a nuclear specialist to realize a couple of things. By the way in 1949 when we agreed to take on Canada as part of a larger nation, we were in the black in Newfoundland, don't forget.

I did not hear the heckle so I do not what was said. Enjoy it anyway.

We came in with a balance in 1949. That is not quite the case right now. There were a couple of reasons. We had a very thriving post-war economy based largely on the military. When I say "the military" I mean the very large presence of American forces in St. John's, many thousands in my riding of Stephenville and many thousands in Argentia and so on. That was a part of it. The strategic realities of the last few years have changed, hence the need for deployment of forces in Newfoundland. American forces have drastically altered over the last few years.

We had a thriving fishing economy as well. I do not need to take the House through what has happened to that, particularly in the last two or three years. When I came to the House for the first time federally in 1979 I used to brag that my riding had the same unemployment rate as the province of Alberta at that particular time which was 3.8 per cent or 4 per cent. That was the unemployment rate in the riding of Burin—St. George's. The south coast of Newfoundland is essentially ice-free year round