

S.O. 29

● (2130)

I want to pay tribute to the 700 residents of the small community of Brown's Arm, about 40 kilometres from Grand Falls, who kept their heads and worked with the fire-fighters for three days battling the blaze that threatened to destroy their community; to the people of the community of Porter-ville, faced with evacuation of their community as well; to the people of the twin towns of Grand Falls and Windsor who were faced with the same kind of conditions; and to the fire boss in that particular region, Clarence Fudge, who, with only a number of hours' sleep over several days, managed to keep coordinated and together his team to launch an effective battle against the blaze that was threatening homes and property in that part of the province.

I said a moment ago that sometimes it takes a natural disaster for us to learn to pull together and to set aside our differences, whether partisan and in the House or provincially. Maybe that spirit of unity and of shared values is what we should reflect upon tonight, not just in paying tribute to those brave people who fought the disastrous blazes in New Brunswick and Newfoundland, but in reflecting upon capturing and keeping that spirit and asking ourselves what we can do as Members of Parliament to make better the tremendous losses that have been suffered.

In the case of Gagetown, if the military is responsible, the Minister has told us that the military will pay and pay quickly. We welcome that, but not all fires were caused by the military. Many of them were acts of God or perhaps acts of carelessness. Nevertheless, there is no one to point a finger at.

What can we do for Newfoundland where 300 square miles of a resource that is essential to the operation of three pulp mills has been lost? I suggest and only suggest—I demand nothing—that the Government consider in a non-partisan way the following suggestion. In Newfoundland, New Brunswick and perhaps British Columbia as well, notwithstanding the recovery generally seen across the country, the unemployment rate remains high. The Province of the Hon. Member for Fundy—Royal, my province and the Province of British Columbia have not shared in the recovery touted across the land.

I suggest that the Government look seriously, given these losses, at a program of massive forestry investment, a program that would save many Canadians who find their way on federally sponsored job-creation programs that last for a short period of time and are sometimes of questionable value, though many of them are excellent. Let us use that money and manpower and reinvest it in our future.

Given the tremendous losses in provinces where these resources are vital, let the Government come forward with a plan that will have two effects. On the one hand, it will alleviate the high, crushing level of unemployment and on the other it will invest, just as farmers invest in their crops every spring, in a resource that will give us a yield four, five or six generations from now. For every 10 cents that is put into a tree

today, down the road that 10 cents will yield a return of tens and tens of dollars.

Given these massive losses, this is indeed the time for the Government to consider this kind of program. The prototype of this program has already been worked out. I mentioned earlier that water bombers from Quebec came to the aid of New Brunswick and Newfoundland, but the prototype of the program about which I am speaking has been developed in British Columbia.

The mayors of Vancouver Island put together a proposal saying to the Government: "We need employment on Vancouver Island. Our unemployment rate is high. All we ask the Governments for are the tools. We are not going to try to develop a silicon valley on Vancouver Island, we are not going to try to develop a manufacturing industry where one currently does not exist, we are not going to try to turn Vancouver Island into a suburb of Toronto, we are only going to enhance our natural resource, the forest. We want to put people to work and we want to give them the dignity of a job but we want an investment in our future at the same time". That is the kind of innovative thinking that should be occurring now. It should involve not only the participation of the Government of Canada but the active participation, financially and otherwise, of the Governments of the affected provinces.

If the forested land, much of it prime timberland, is not replaced, it cannot be harvested later. That means, as sure as we sit in this House, that jobs in the future will be lost because the trees simply will not be there to be cut. These are not hypothetical trees. These trees have to be replaced.

The only way New Brunswick and Newfoundland can continue with their current levels of production is by over-cutting 10 or 15 years from now. The only way they can over-cut is by dramatically increasing silvaculture programs so that downstream there will be an even greater amount of timber to be harvested than would have otherwise been the case.

This proposal I ask the Government to consider is not one that will simply create short-term jobs, though it will do that. It is not one that will simply invest in our future, though it will do that. It is one which is necessary to maintain Canada's place in the world pulp and paper markets.

We talk about unemployment so much in this place that we lose our ability to see the human face of unemployment. We tend to think about 9 per cent, 12 per cent and 14 per cent unemployment rates, 29 per cent in my riding and only 16 in another riding. We read the unemployment numbers as if they were pieces of paper off the stock exchange telling us which way the stocks went, up or down. We forget the human face.

This weekend I was in a little community in my riding called Lark Harbour. I met a gentleman in Lark Harbour who has maintained his family in that small fishing village for most of the last 20 years by going away for six months of the year and working. This man had always been proud of himself because, despite the fact that he lived in a place of high unemployment, he did whatever he had to do and went wherever he had to go