

S.O. 29

seven people works in the forest. That is a lot. This industry represents \$250 million in wages each year.

This loss, especially in wooded acres, represents the loss of hundreds of jobs, and this is certainly no laughing matter if we look to the future. In view of an unemployment rate much higher than the national average, a rate which is the second highest in Canada, the future looks far from promising. I must admit that there is nothing that would tend to contradict this outlook.

● (2030)

Recently, the federal Government reduced its allocations to employment strategy programs. No funds were allocated for this fiscal year. The funds are frozen even though hundreds of projects have been submitted. People want to work. These are good people who only want to work.

Many of them and many communities are just waiting for their projects to be accepted to create these jobs, but the Government does nothing. Why is the Government waiting? For the unemployment rate to go even higher? It is already unacceptable.

In view of the recent disaster in New Brunswick, I explicitly ask this Government to act as soon as possible, and I ask the Members Opposite to put pressure on the Government in this regard. Incentives must be provided immediately. The employment problem in New Brunswick . . . I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, but I have a bad flu coming on; it has nothing to do with the forest fires. I was saying that the employment problem in New Brunswick requires immediate action and the recent disaster makes us realize that we have to create jobs because an unemployment rate of 15 per cent is much too high and these people have to be put back to work.

Also, the consequences of this disaster were not limited only to its impact on the economy, for there was also an impact on several affected families. As a matter of fact, several houses, buildings, barns and private wood lots were burnt to the ground. Mr. Speaker, we must ask ourselves if the Government should not come to the aid of these families. We could compare fire with other natural disasters such as floods and storms for which the Government has often provided assistance. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I ask the question: Will the Government in this case provide some assistance? I sincerely believe that it should do so and surely my honourable colleagues from New Brunswick believe so too. The federal Government should indeed discuss forthwith this matter with the provinces to determine an action plan, for the situation is most urgent.

On the other hand, the Government appears to be responsible for the action of the military at CFB Gagetown who started one of the biggest fires in the province. Now, I think that the military authorities have admitted and accepted the responsibility for this fire which burnt the facilities on the base and several homes to the ground. This afternoon, we were told in the House that there would be an investigation to determine

who was responsible. I sincerely wish that this investigation will take place as soon as possible and I suggest it would be fair for the Government to offer right away some support to these families, because they are homeless, their homes having been burnt down. I believe therefore that we have a responsibility and that we should consider helping them.

But this fire in Gagetown was only one among 60 others. Near my riding, a fire started in the Kouchibouguac National Park, an area which attracts visitors by the hundreds of thousands every year. Fortunately, this fire was brought under control before it had time to cause too much damage. Yesterday, I flew over that region and I could appreciate the good work the volunteers have done fighting the forest fires. The situation in the New Brunswick forests was explosive. I could see from high up in the air where the fire had burnt and, in several places, where it had jumped 100 metres and even more.

I mention this to underline that the people fighting the fires were risking their lives. Most of them were volunteers. I should like here to pay tribute to these people for their work, dedication and willingness to leave their homes and try to save the New Brunswick forests at their own risk.

I should like also to thank the other provinces which have come to our assistance, as well as the State of Maine. I can assure you that the people in Atlantic Canada will not forget this assistance, this gesture made in friendship.

Since several of these fires were caused by human errors, probably neglect, should we not better educate the public? During a week-end broadcast, I heard people say that they did not really mind the forest being destroyed, since it belongs to big corporations. I suggest we should take this opportunity to tell people that the forests belong to us. It is part of our heritage. We should preserve them. Above all, we should use them to create jobs.

I mentioned a while ago that our unemployment rate is very high. That is true. That is unacceptable. Why not take this opportunity to establish new reforestation programs? We hear people say: The forest does not provide as many jobs as it is believed because the whole cutting process is made with machines. Well, we could decide that the whole reforestation should be handmade and not machine-made. That is what people want. They want jobs. They want to contribute to the economy. They are not satisfied with staying home and collecting unemployment insurance or welfare benefits. They want to work. Perhaps we could draw a lesson from this situation, a disaster just the same. Perhaps people could benefit from it.

I urge therefore the Government to set up reforestation programs to make it possible for people to work and try and save the wood which has not been destroyed, because I believe that some of the wood can still be saved.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I should like to say that the time has come for the Government to act. Empty promises are not enough. That simply will not do. It must act, find a