

Unemployment

and sorrow for the people rather than demand of the government that there be in place the kinds of requirements which make it necessary to take into account the effect of plant closures and shutdowns on the people in those communities.

When other countries in the world were faced with the kind of economic restructuring that this country is now going through, they began to set up the necessary consultative programs to allow the change-overs to take place. They put in place the requirements which made it necessary for companies that were under economic pressure to still live up to their obligations to their employees and to the communities in which they were located. In Canada, legislation regarding labour standards is generally considered to be within provincial jurisdiction, but in truth that is not necessarily so. There could be and should be an over-all strategy in Ottawa which ties together the strengths of the nation, enables the people of Canada to move freely and to find new employment, and requires that people who receive FIRA approval and government grants live up to their commitments.

● (1550)

What was apparent 30 years ago in places like Sweden is only beginning to become apparent in Canada. Labour-management groups were established in major industry to prepare workers for redundancy two years in advance and to finance relocation and retraining. Unemployment was held down despite massive shifts in the economy. Now that we are faced with the same thing in Canada, why are we not moving ahead? Why do we not require a pooling of resources and that there be the money up front to guarantee employees will be retrained and be able to maintain their families during periods of dislocation? Why do we not require that such communities be repaid for the investment they made in providing the necessary site for the location of those companies? Why do we not put in place the kind of economic strategy that puts the Canadian people first? We should insist that one of the costs of doing business in Canada is that attention be paid to the effect of a particular enterprise on the people employed in it and on their families, and that attention be paid to the effects of relocation and dislocation on the communities involved.

I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that the answer is not easy, but neither is it impossible. It can be found. Others have found it; others have faced it and succeeded. I cannot for the life of me understand why we should be offering sympathy and sorrow in place of action.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond on behalf of the government. I believe all members of the House share the degree of sympathy and concern on this issue that is expressed in the resolution. Where we differ is on the kind of approach that we would propose to take.

I shall begin by saying that I think it is important, when discussing unemployment, to shear away much of the mythology and mystique, and sometimes the misrepresentation, that surrounds the topic. I do not think any of us in this House gain

anything by going through the monthly ritual of bringing out the employment statistics as a weapon for battering the government over the head. I think this matter is so important that it should engage all of us in an effort to discover answers to the problem. In order to do that, we must share a sense of the reality of economic conditions, shear away some of the more florid and flamboyant rhetoric—with apologies to some members who preceded me—and give an accurate portrayal of what is taking place in this country. In this way we will have a road map to guide us.

I do not think any of us gain by constantly shooting into the air great clouds of smoke and fog in an effort to cause confusion. I will try to dissipate some of that fog and smoke generated by the hon. member for Calgary West (Mr. Hawkes). I do not think he was as relevant with his remarks today as he was two weeks ago, when he spent half an hour of the time of the House trying to decide what time it was. His remarks were far more relevant in that debate than they are in this. He did not do his party or this House a service by bringing forward a convoluted tabulation of statistics which was obviously geared to certain election proceedings taking place outside this House, and he totally obscured the reality of what is taking place in this country.

It is interesting to see how people use statistics in different ways. I think it is necessary to provide some correction to the position taken by the hon. member in the propositions he put forward. First of all, he tried to indicate that unemployment is uniquely and solely the problem of this country. He suggested, as did the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans), that Canada had the worst employment problem in the world. As you and I know, Mr. Speaker, that is totally contrary to the truth. Over the past decade, even over the past year, we have had the highest growth in employment of any industrial country with the exception of Australia, which this year had a rate .1 per cent higher than ours. In the period 1973 to 1979, the employment growth rate in Canada was 3.2 per cent, compared to the United States where it was 2.5 per cent, Japan, 1 per cent, West Germany minus .6 per cent, Italy 1.5 per cent, Sweden 1.1 per cent and the United Kingdom .4 per cent.

For all the flourish of the hon. member opposite, he does not deal with the facts. Last year 326,000 jobs were created in this country. In the last three months 140,000 jobs were created. In the last year 178,000 jobs were created for women alone. The employment rate for women has dropped from 7.5 per cent, when the Conservatives took power, to 6.2 per cent this year.

We can take some satisfaction from those facts, Mr. Speaker. They are not the total answer, but we should not be running our country down and denying the progress made in the light of very serious and negative world-wide economic conditions.

It is crazy to talk about the employment picture while avoiding what is going on in the world around us. Does the hon. member for Calgary West, the oil-producing centre of Canada, forget that oil prices have gone up 500 per cent, 600 per cent, 700 per cent, 800 per cent since 1973? This has generated huge profits and enormous inflationary pressures on our economy and every other economy. Is the hon. member not