

*Private Members' Business*

• (1740)

We could, of course, look for a way out in conjunction with the private sector. A variety of programs exist within the department, as we have said time and again, to help workers find new placement and to help companies forced to proceed to massive layoffs carry out studies and assess what the future holds for them.

What good does that do? I spoke to some of the families involved after that intervention and they could not believe their eyes or their ears.

The minister went on to say in response to my supplementary question:

It is important to sit down with the employer and the worker and figure out precisely what their needs are for the future.

I can tell you what their needs are for the future. I have been telling this House and the government since February 19 what their needs are. Their needs are some money, some income, some subsistence to put bread and butter and something a little more than bread and butter which the average Canadian has become accustomed to, on their table. I do not think that is an unreasonable request. I do not think I am asking for very much. I do not think it is very difficult for the government to find this money. I do not care where it gets it. I know it is strapped for money.

We are talking about \$2 million or maybe less. The only recourse for these people other than to have me get up and plead their case, and others who will plead when I sit down, is to apply for social services. I am saying that all Canadians, not just Newfoundlanders, have respect. They do not like to apply for social assistance. When they are strapped, they have no alternative.

Social services pays them \$7,200 a year maximum for a family and that is about one-third the average income in my riding, one-quarter the average income in Newfoundland and one seventh the average income in Canada. Most of them have not done that yet, because they have self respect. Some of them have had to do it.

I am hoping that within a couple of days, tomorrow, Friday, the end of this week, there will be some compassion and benevolence. I do not like to use those words. I do not like to beg. I am not used to begging. The people I represent are not used to begging. They have not begged me but they have asked me, implored me. They are desperate and I am close to desperate also. I am not

saying this to take credit for the effort but I do not know where else to go.

On May 8, when I finished speaking in this House and got the response to my question, I then wrote to the minister. I said: "This is a serious situation. It needs immediate response". It is now May 21 and I have not even had a phone call. No response. I do not know where to go. If I thought doing a handstand in this House, other than provoking the leader to ask me to behave in a more responsible parliamentary manner, if I thought that would get some action from the government, I would do it. I know you would not agree with that, but when a person is desperate they resort to desperate means. I would bring my guitar and sing a song if I thought that would help.

**An hon. member:** You can do it.

**Mr. Mifflin:** The Speaker says I can do it. His background I guess in athletics would probably want him to see me do it.

Having been challenged, I am not sure it is the kind of thing I would want to do anyway.

The point I am making is what can I do to get attention? I am not looking for media attention. I am not looking for attention from anybody. I want action. I want some results. I want somebody from that side of the House to say: "We believe you have a problem. We believe those 70 families on the Bonavista Peninsula have a problem because the government reduced the northern cod quota, because there was not much there to begin with because the foreigners all caught it, because the government has not the political will to do something about it. It needs to take some action".

I do not mean action of the Rio conference at which there are 30,000 people and 75 heads of state and the thing goes on for a week or so. The last time that was tried was down in Dartmouth a week ago with no results. They say you have to go to the countries. The countries say you have to go to the European Community.

We are not going to make too many points with that crowd that way.

Until we see some political will to do something that will cause the northern cod to increase, to have a quota that is reasonable that will allow the plant to open, which is what these people want and is what I want, let us have a bit of compassion.