

Supply

● (1620)

Indeed, it has been the motive on this side of the House to attack those conditions in two ways, as I tried to point out in my comments: first, to create jobs, long-term or short-term, but to create jobs needed to satisfy those conditions; second, when that has not been possible, to provide to people through the Unemployment Insurance Commission, the NEED Program, the Canada Assistance Program and all the other efforts which we undertake some short-term financial relief, in the form of social payments for which people have the right, and job opportunities in the form of short-term efforts such as Summer Canada for students, the NEED Program for people whose Unemployment Insurance benefits have ended, or community development projects for targeted groups. I do not think our record is one to back away from. Those have been our efforts to provide support for people in greatest need and to provide cures immediately and in the long term. Equally, we are spurred into that because of our dislike of and horror at the circumstances of people who are unemployed.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I just want to comment, as I may under the rules. The Member has really asked a question. I asked him whether or not he was proud of the results of the efforts and his answer was no. However, he said that he was proud of the efforts of the Government. I am not suggesting at all that the Government has made no effort. I am saying that the efforts have apparently been inadequate. I join with the Member in waiting until next Tuesday evening to see the adequacy of the measures brought forward by the Government in power to meet the very problems which he has outlined so eloquently. I believe there is a great responsibility on the Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde) to deal with those problems next week. I just wanted to ensure my hon. friend understood the thrust of my remarks.

Mr. Fisher: Mr. Speaker, about three-quarters of the way through my speech I said that the practical details of any Government program will be the ones that provoke debate. We have just seen an example of that. Again I underline that I am pleased to see that 50 years of effort to build up a safety net by all kinds of Government, Tory and Liberal, has in fact provided at least a very high floor for people to rely on.

It is not a satisfactory position to be collecting Unemployment Insurance or to be receiving social assistance payments, but equally those are payments and support to which people are entitled. It is their right as Canadians to know that bad economic times will not destroy them personally. They are entitled to that. I am only saying now that I am proud of our record as a Government in creating a safety net for those unemployed people to whom the Hon. Member referred.

I am equally proud of our short-term job creation record and of our efforts to cure the long-term problem. Those cures are not there yet, I agree. The recovery is still coming, I agree. But at the same time the Government has provided some leadership and has tried to provide those cures.

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of short questions for the Hon. Member. He outlined a variety of reasons for being proud of the efforts of the Government to reduce the unemployment rate. If one looks at the record, month after month one finds that the figures keep rising and there are more and more unemployed. We are now up to the officially adjusted limit of 1.6 million and climbing. There will be 900,000 young people coming on to the job market in the next ten weeks, seeking work in a very competitive environment. Those figures will rise even higher.

Other countries have virtually declared states of emergency because their figures have increased to around the 3 per cent range. They considered it a calamity or an emergency requiring extraordinary measures, not little job creation programs. Why has his Government not taken the same position when our figures are four times higher than the figures of these countries?

Mr. Fisher: Which country is less than 3 per cent?

Mr. Riis: Japan, for example, with 2.7 per cent. They declared virtually a state of emergency. Why did not Canada?

Mr. Fisher: Mr. Speaker, I believe the efforts undertaken by the Government indicate very clearly that we consider it an emergency and that in fact we have tried to cure the problem of these people. The Hon. Member keeps referring to little work programs and so on. I am sorry to say that I object to that. I believe that when unemployment around the world is at the 35 million figure, when our economy, which is an open trading economy, is limited by the weakness of our trading partners, and when our own internal economic forces are on the mend, then we take short-term measures to help people through the worst of the trouble. I do not object to that process. In fact, it seems better to offer people worth-while program such as NEED jobs, as the Catholic church in Toronto and the Government of Canada together have done. That is better than just giving people income because they can be proud of the efforts they contributed to society in the short term. I do not think there is anything wrong with short-term jobs. When people need help, they will take it one day at a time. They will not, as the Hon. Member does, call it short-term, little programs and so on.

Mr. Thomson: Mr. Speaker, I have just a quick question concerning the pride of the Hon. Member in job creation. Could he explain how many jobs the National Energy Program created for Canadians and how many jobs were created by the acquisition by Petro-Canada of BP and Petrofina?

Mr. Fisher: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, but I do not have specific figures to give the Hon. Member. At the same time let me indicate that I would not think either the National Energy Program or those two acquisitions weakened our economy, unlike the dogmatic response we always get from that Hon. Member.

Mr. Waddell: Mr. Speaker, do I have time to ask a question?