

● (5:00 p.m.)

I referred the other day to the latest report from APEC, a very important and dedicated body in Atlantic Canada. They pointed out on November 6:

And the outlook for construction is bleak, with a 30 to 40 per cent fall in the value of construction contracts awarded in the first seven months of the year.

"Most indications of the business climate in the region in the closing months of 1970 and the first half of 1971 are not good"—

"Prospects for resurgence from the slowdown of the past few months are not favourable since there are few signs of significant federal or provincial measures to offset the current slowdown."

They go on to say:

"It may be too late already to avert a severe economic crisis in the region this winter..."

The government of Canada cannot put into effect all remedial measures which are necessary, although I believe and affirm here that the prime responsibility is theirs. Other jurisdictions within the region must also accept their share of responsibility and must be called in for a massive assault upon the problems which for too long have inhibited our growth.

In fairness, I must say that something has been commenced by the government in Ottawa. Since the then Premier Smith of Nova Scotia raised the question of economic disparity to the level of agenda discussion at the Dominion-provincial conference, the question has at least earned a new level of constitutional respectability. What has been accomplished, however, is much less than what has been proclaimed. There has been a great deal of sounding of trumpets, and far too few advances. Plans, programs and projects have been plotted by the Department of Regional Economic Expansion, a plethora of them, and of course we all accept the need for planning and innovation. We are not fearful of new techniques and new approaches.

But apart from studies, apart from long range plans, have we had a serious assault on the grave problems facing us now, this fall, this coming winter? The signs are, as I have indicated in the quote from the APEC report and others I could bring to bear, that the winter ahead down east will be once again a winter of discontent. These are grim forecasts. In considering the cold realities of the last many years, none of us is sufficiently optimistic to believe as we would like to believe that these statistical projections will be proven wrong in the actuality.

One especially disturbing and recurring problem is the high incidence of unemployment among the young in our region. It has grown chronic year after year and has been invariably twice the national average. The only reason it is not twice the national average at this moment is that the national figures have gone so bad. That is what happened to the statistics.

How long have we known down there that the basic problem was at its worst for those under 24 years of age, as indicated by the figures that the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis) mentioned for the nation. Do we

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not realize that the figures are deflated somewhat by the constant and eternal outward migration from the region toward Toronto where our young people end up looking for what they think is the promised land, some of them even making the newspaper columns of some slick metropolitan daily which refer to the dispossessed Maritimers who wear white socks? Very clever!

A shocking figure with regard to housing came out the other day. Housing starts in the four Atlantic provinces for the first nine months of this year totalled 3,351, a drop of 39 per cent from the 5,509 starts recorded during the same period last year. In every province there is a drop in the figures relating to this very important matter of housing. There is a serious lagging in the construction industry. There is much that has to be done, much that demands action immediately. While we appreciate the fact that there are some plans under way by the Department of Regional Economic Expansion, we ask that attention be given to the problems that face us this fall and this coming winter, before that which has long been bad becomes far worse.

One thing that has always troubled me, as the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Marchand) tries to do something for the region—and I believe he is trying—is that there is no pervasion into other departments of the government of the general concept of regional disparity. We find that as he tries to set up long range employment opportunities, some of his colleagues through their departments will be taking measures which result in under-employment and unemployment. Projects are cut off, personnel is diminished. Surely, if we are serious about the question of regional disparity, every department in the government should recognize the fact and govern itself accordingly, so that the dispersion of these disparities, if I may be alliterative, becomes the prime role and high priority of the government.

I think also that we must move quickly for concerted action by all levels of government. We must regionalize our assault upon the problems in the Atlantic provinces. I am doubtful if a Maritime union will come about quickly, but we must, we should and we can have a great deal more co-ordination and co-operation as we assault the massive problems which are shrinking the economy of the provinces by the sea.

I ask again for the government to show a little sensitivity to the immediate problem. I will give an example. In the province of Prince Edward Island there is one industry which is capable of great expansion, namely the tourist industry. It does not require a royal commission to go to the Charlottetown airport and count the number of seats in the aircraft and the number of seats in the terminal building to know that we need an extended airport. One does not need to be a genius to know that in my constituency, which is the smallest in terms of land and much smaller in terms of agricultural production, where we produce a million and a quarter pounds of blueberries, a freezing plant would be a good thing. You do not need a five year plan to realize this.

I can only cite these as some of the immediate aids to solve our economic problems. I bring these problems