

Unemployment

its back on full employment and it has betrayed the best interests of the people of Canada.

(Translation):

Mr. Fernand Girard (Lapointe): I must confess it is easy for opposition members to attack the government on this important unemployment problem, and to saddle it with the responsibility in this regard. Still it must be admitted that criticism has been made all too easy, first by the seriousness of the situation, a situation steadily growing worse to the point where, at this time, there are 600,000 unemployed, an impressive figure, and second, by the failure of the government to take action. It has been content to adopt a defensive attitude, making no attempt at any useful action.

I have listened closely to the speeches made by members on both sides of the house. Moreover, I have been reading the newspapers in order to ascertain the reaction of the people of this country to the course taken by the debate in this house and to the attitude of the government. It is obvious that the general feeling can be expressed as follows: The government seems far more concerned with warding off attacks than with taking any positive action in order to solve this unemployment problem.

The hon. member for Maisonneuve-Rosemont (Mr. Deschatelets) was saying last week that, with fewer speeches on the subject, the government would now be at the stage where it would be voting money for the solution of the unemployment problem. But the hon. member forgets that, while the government has had a whole year to look for a solution, it has procrastinated, and put us off, by saying that any unemployment was merely seasonal and regional. The Canadian people, in fact, feel that the government have been putting them off with fine words, on this unfortunate matter. For a year now the government has been claiming that unemployment was merely seasonal or regional and was only an adjustment in the economic situation. Nevertheless the number of jobless has gone on increasing. It has now reached 600,000, an impressive figure, in one of the richest countries in the world.

It is an easy thing to fiddle around with words. One could, of course, say with the government that we have seasonal unemployment for we have it in all seasons; one could also admit that we have local unemployment since it is acute in every locality. But that would only add to the torrent of words that we have already heard while 600,000 unemployed are looking for work. Will the needy

unemployed find comfort in the thought that their unemployment is seasonal?

What would the government say if unemployment were to bring about its downfall at the next elections and if, by way of comfort, it was told by the electorate not to worry about it because it would be merely a seasonal defeat?

By way of rebuttal, the government insist that members of the opposition are pessimistic. Words again! How indeed can you be optimistic when there are 600,000 unemployed in a country as rich as ours? More eager to free itself than to act, the government thought it would find another way out, in shifting part of its responsibilities onto the provinces.

The solution looks fine, but what real relief does it bring to the unemployed? Whether or not the provinces have any responsibility as far as unemployment is concerned, they will say to the government: "You have taken over our sources of revenue, do not give us the responsibilities."

It seems to me that the Canadian people should not look too much to the federal-provincial conference for the solution to a problem such as unemployment. The provinces will say to the government: you take 77 cents of each tax dollar; give us back our powers and we will look after our responsibilities.

All sorts of things have been mentioned as unemployment causes, but there is one consideration which should prevail. It is that, whether or not the government is more or less responsible for unemployment causes, it has the responsibility of organizing our economy in such a way as to create employment for everybody, the more so in our country, with all its wealth. I think that as soon as it became evident that unemployment was increasing the government should have added to the number of trade commissioners posted in every country in the world. Thus, by adding one small order to the other in each country, an imposing volume of exports could have been reached, as it is a well-known fact that one of the main reasons for unemployment is found in sluggish exports, for in Canada we do not lack producers, but consumers. It could therefore be said that if our consumption were increased our unemployment problem would be settled.

As I say, there should be reductions in taxation, for they would result in a higher purchasing power on the part of Canadian taxpayers who would thus be able to absorb our surplus of consumer goods.