

Regional Unemployment

I would never suggest that the government ought to try to impose its own plan of development in the Atlantic provinces, but I do say that the government of Canada, with all its departments, and the Atlantic provinces should develop and implement together a plan, as opposed to this hodge-podge of provincial and sectional agreements which the department has entered into and developed. I am not against an agreement relating, say, to the Gaspé, Cote de Sud, northern New Brunswick, southwestern Nova Scotia or any other region, but I do insist that such an agreement shall relate to a regional development strategy, to a development strategy for the whole region, if it is to mean anything.

I have long been struck by the lack of political courage of the federal government when it comes to matters of regional development. It seems afraid to offend a particular member of parliament, or is afraid of losing a seat. A proper strategy to develop the economy of the Atlantic provinces is not going to please everybody, every member of parliament or every community in those provinces; but it must be done. The strategy must be developed. The program be developed in co-operation with the provinces. It must be done, and it can be sold. If the minister wants to know about a technique, I suggest he should look into the technique of voluntary economic planning.

I am not asking him to use the particular plan which was evolved. By encouraging representatives of industrial sectors to work with officials it proved possible in Nova Scotia ten years ago to get agreement on a plan. That plan would never have been accepted if the province of Nova Scotia had tried on its own to impose it. If the minister or his colleagues in government are too timid to work toward a regional plan for the Atlantic provinces, I suggest the technique I just mentioned might lead to a sharing of the risks and make such a course more acceptable. Surely the government can do something like that.

Sir, after eight years of existence DREE has not yet attacked the problems of the Atlantic region. It is not yet attacking the problems holding back the entire region. I recognize that each province is different, that each province has different opportunities; but there are factors holding back the entire region. After eight years the department and the minister have not identified these factors. Or, if the minister has identified them, he has failed to attack them.

My time this afternoon is limited. I am pleased that the Economic Council of Canada has once again interested itself in regional economic disparities. I am pleased by the fundamental optimism of the Economic Council of Canada report to which the minister referred. It is optimistic that we can succeed. I find some interesting suggestions in it. For instance, it says that we should use to better advantage the tools we have been using, and try new tools which are available but which we have not used.

It is interesting to note the council suggested that intraregional trade, or trade within the Atlantic region generally, is relatively more important than interregional trade. It is interesting to see the explanation for the jump in unemployment which always takes place in the Atlantic provinces in the

[Mr. Stanfield.]

course of a recession, and to compare that jump with unemployment in other provinces. The council explains that this is owing to greater shrinkage in demand in the Atlantic provinces than takes place in other provinces or regions of Canada. If this is so, this fact can have a tremendous cumulative effect in retarding the development of the Atlantic provinces.

I asked the minister in committee what he thought of this idea and what he thought of the council's suggestion that the federal government and the provinces should establish a fiscal stabilization program to overcome the shrinkage in demand in the region which accompanies every national recession. I say this because the theory of the Economic Council of Canada corresponds to the gut feeling of maritimers that this has been happening with drastic consequences to the economy of the region. Mr. Speaker, DREE cannot implement such a concept on its own. I therefore ask, what is the minister's attitude? The council's suggestion is far different from the government's suggestion concerning tax benefits within the region. The council's suggestion is related to eliminating the additional depressing effects of national recessions on economic growth in the Atlantic provinces. The concept of the council is different from that of the Minister of Finance or the Minister of Regional Expansion (Mr. Lessard). What are the government's views on the council's suggestion?

There is not any one solution to the problems of the Atlantic provinces, or the economic problems of Quebec. We cannot be content with the kinds of improvised suggestions and policies which have come forward so far from DREE. It is good to see the Economic Council of Canada taking a hard look at what has been happening. As the minister said, the problem is a difficult one. I agree that it is difficult. But no country has found the solution to such problems an easy matter. The Economic Council is not pessimistic. We have made some progress and we have seen some development—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but I must inform him that his allotted time has expired. It has been suggested that since 12 more speakers wish to speak, we should have no extension of time.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Eymard Corbin (Madawaska-Victoria): Mr. Speaker, in my opening remarks I cannot help but compare today's motion to a spring shower. It was rather sudden, the initial downpour was heavy, if not exaggerated, and conducive to erosion.

Mr. Alkenbrack: And good for the country at the same time.

Mr. Corbin: There is something basically unfair in the way our rules allow opposition parties to bring sudden motions before the House, motions on which there should be substantial and in-depth discussion. If we finally get down seriously to reforming the rules governing this institution, the area of notice of supply proceedings coming under Standing Order