

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

An hon. Member: Keep the wages down.

Mr. Lang: I heard an hon. member say that we should keep the wages down. That, of course, is part of the complicated proposition. I commend to him that his friends in the labour movement might well direct more of their power, which is considerable, to the demand for decreased prices from their employers instead of increased wages. In that fashion, he and his friends could help to protect those who are on fixed incomes and otherwise unprotected.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): You might as well go to the Senate too.

● (10:10 p.m.)

[Translation]

ECONOMIC REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT—
REQUEST FOR SHERBROOKE AREA TO
BE CONSIDERED AS A SPECIAL AREA

Mr. Henry Latulippe (Compton): Mr. Speaker, on March 6, I asked the future Minister of Economic Regional Development the following question:

Could he tell the house whether his program intended to abolish regional disparities will be amended in such a way that the Sherbrooke area and some neighbouring areas will be considered as special areas?

Mr. Speaker, I should like to describe, in the few moment at my disposal, the economic situation that prevails in the area where I live.

This region of the province of Quebec, situated in the Eastern Townships, was once rather prosperous. It did not need an economic council nor something else to live, because the inhabitants could manage by themselves.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak this evening about three pilot towns in the area, namely Scotstown, Coaticook and Lac Mégantic.

Scotstown, for example, Mr. Speaker had some 4,000 inhabitants about six years ago. Today, the population of the same municipality has dropped to 2,000. At the beginning, the population was provided with schools, municipal services; a church which cost about \$400,000 was even constructed. Today, as a result of the exodus of its taxpayers, the municipality has a huge debt due to the construction of the church, schools and municipal services.

I would like to know what the new Department of Regional Economic Expansion can do to help such a parish or town.

Let us consider now the town of Coaticook with a population of 8,000 two years ago and which has now dropped to some 7,000. The municipal authorities of Coaticook have incurred heavy expenditures. In fact, they have established numerous services: schools, playgrounds, etc. It is now saddled with a huge debt and its taxpayers are getting fewer. Those who remain must bear alone the burden of debts for schools, municipal services and church.

The city of Lac Mégantic, where I live, had in the past a population of over 9,000; it has only 7,000 now. It is in the same predicament. That city provided the people with all kinds of services a few years ago. Today, the population is decreasing and the town still owes large amounts on its schools, its church and its municipal services, including playgrounds and arenas. The social organization is very good in all respects, but people are now leaving, nevertheless.

Around such municipalities, we have rural parishes that were flourishing some years ago. The number of farmers has decreased by more than 70 per cent during the last ten years. The surrounding population, which helped such towns prosper is also today in very disquieting circumstances.

The population is emigrating in great numbers to the United States because we are close to the United States border and Americans have a great many jobs to offer. People are much attracted to the other side of the border. Salaries are higher and therefore our people are emigrating to the United States. Those who do not go there are going to Sherbrooke, to Montreal, to Quebec or to other cities. Those areas remain deserted, underprivileged in every respect. What is worse are the huge debts that those municipalities have accumulated and which small taxpayers who remained there are practically unable to pay.

Therefore, I would like to know whether we intend to tackle the problems of this area, for instance those of the town of Coaticook, which has been annexed to the Sherbrooke area. The town of Scotstown is annexed to Sherbrooke which however is not considered as a city faced with problems of regional disparities but rather as a fairly prosperous city. In spite of the fact that there is a great deal of unemployment and poverty in Sherbrooke, this area is not considered as a have-not area. In fact, a large part of my constituency has been attached to that area. However, all our municipalities—I only named three main towns in this constituency—are poverty