

Regional Development Incentives Act

Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) in his budget statement.

It is somewhat paradoxical on the part of the Minister of Finance, who exerted himself in order to create unemployment, to rely now on his colleague, the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion, to repair the blunders he made while fighting inflation.

● (9:30 p.m.)

Unemployment has spread all over Canada and more especially in the province of Quebec, on a seemingly permanent basis and it is high time that something be done to solve this problem.

The most recent statistics show that there were 476,000 unemployed workers in Canada in November, including 168,000 in Quebec.

Whoever has had anything to do with manpower or labour will easily admit that the misery resulting from such a situation is catastrophic and has a tremendous impact on the population.

It has become exceedingly urgent, since this action has come too late, to change this situation.

If my interpretation of the hon. minister's remarks is correct, one of the bill's provisions would cover grants to firms and another would provide a guarantee for loans.

The legislation seems to me to be a fair one, and can be extremely useful since it will allow many small industries to avail themselves of such loan opportunities.

Many firms could have benefited by such legislation in the past. In my region, we lost industries which could have continued to provide employment, had my representations been acted upon earlier. For instance, we lost a shoe factory. Many other industries have had to cut down on their staff.

The implications this can have on the economic situation of a medium-sized city like Saint-Hyacinthe can readily be imagined, particularly when the same situation prevails in other similar municipalities.

During his speech this afternoon, the minister said he expected that within a few months, this measure would create at least 15,000 new jobs and that nearly 50,000 more would follow later. We greatly need them, in order to create a sound economic climate in Canada and especially in the province of Quebec.

I would not think of blaming the minister for that. I merely want to express my satisfaction to see that, at last, he has taken the necessary steps to make of the area of Saint-Hyacinthe a designated area and thus, remove an injustice that was causing very great difficulties to all the people in my riding, and particularly in the city of Saint-Hyacinthe.

I reiterate my satisfaction to see that the minister has introduced this legislation and I expect very encouraging results.

Mr. Roch La Salle (Joliette): Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a few remarks on this important legislation.

[Mr. Ricard.]

Like my colleague the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe (Mr. Ricard) who took this opportunity to express his views, I think that it is also normal that the representatives of other ridings should take this opportunity to do the same.

Living in a province which has largely benefited from grants these last two years, I would be ill-advised to blame the government or the minister.

However, I respect what has been said by some of my colleagues who represent other parts of Canada and maybe they have not obtained as many subsidies as they wished. They should inform the responsible minister.

In all objectivity, I feel it is my duty to express my satisfaction with the bill, and my satisfaction, as a Quebecer, with the grants of which the province of Quebec may have benefited in the last two years and also with the concern shown by that department for the past and present difficulties facing Quebec.

At any rate, I do not think that the Department of Regional Economic Expansion can offer a final solution to all our country's economic problems. I do believe, however, that it constitutes a means of improving the situation just as other departments must find quickly some other remedies.

I will not hesitate to speak objectively, because I have always wished for and demanded this objectivity. Needless to add that I am satisfied with the bill. For the past two years, I have been the elected representative of a riding that does not have the same advantages as some others.

I took care to ask for the consideration of the minister on behalf of the intermediate groups and the various municipalities of my constituency. I admit most humbly but with great satisfaction that last week's statement recognizing my constituency as a "designated area" was good news both for my electors and for myself. After informing the minister of the special reasons which led us to ask for such special designation, I cannot but thank him for his objectivity in dealing with briefs submitted to him.

It is obvious that with this special designation we will be better able to compete with other designated areas. These grants provide our municipalities with an efficient tool, but they have the responsibility of creating a climate that will encourage investments, of offering at least the necessary services to the industries interested in setting up plants in our ridings.

I would like to take this opportunity to ask for very special attention, since we always refer to "special areas". Of course the Sainte-Scholastique airport project not too far from my own riding will require the Quebec government to undertake certain works to accommodate this airport.

Negotiations are presently under way between Quebec and Ottawa and I trust that the minister will make every effort to expedite matters so that, as a result, we get this designation of "special area", which would, once again, allow the people of my riding to see its rate of unemploy-