

● (2040)

I want to speak briefly about the extent of the problem. Although I will concentrate on British Columbia, that part of Canada I know best; other provinces and other communities suffer in the same way.

Before Christmas I took part in a tour arranged by our caucus during which we visited communities across Canada. At that time we discovered that the problems of the fish plant workers in Newfoundland were very much the same as the problems of the fish plant workers in Victoria or Prince Rupert. Factory workers in Nova Scotia face the same personal problems as the unemployed mill workers in British Columbia or the auto workers in Ontario.

Across Canada there were 122,000 fewer jobs in December of 1981 than in September of that year; there were 57,000 fewer jobs in December than there had been in November. In 1980, on the other hand, jobs actually increased from September to November by 64,000. This past year the number of jobs declined by 122,000.

When we look at the projections in the budget we see that we will continue to be faced with unemployment rates of 8 per cent, or above, right through until 1985, and by 1986 the government hopes we might get that down to just slightly below 8 per cent. Today we saw that leaked document which said that by the end of March there will be 175,000 more unemployed than now. In British Columbia we have 115,000 people officially unemployed—an all-time high. We have another 50,000 so called discouraged workers who are not on the official rolls, making a total of 165,000 British Columbians who should be working but cannot find jobs.

In Victoria the regional rate rose from 8 per cent in November to 8.7 per cent in December. On other parts of Vancouver Island it rose from 10.2 per cent in November to 11.5 per cent in December, and that compares with 7.1 per cent in December of 1980. The number of people who were actually employed in British Columbia dropped by 34,000 between September and December of 1981.

Over the past year, 18 industries in Victoria have closed, throwing people out of work; 40 people in one industry, 120 in another and 200 in yet another. I would like to talk about a couple of those industries.

First let me refer to the Oakland fish plant where 250 jobs are on the line. This is a plant owned and controlled by Japanese interests. It is a modern facility only seven years old. It has been making a profit, but the multinational corporations which control it feel they can make even more of a profit if they rationalize, as they say, their operations on the lower mainland. With no consideration for the communities or the people involved this plant is to be shut down and the industry will be rationalized on the lower mainland.

This is the same sort of thing that happened with the Nelson Brothers cannery after B.C. Packers took over. It is now in the process of rationalizing its production and shutting down the Nelson Brothers plant at Port Edward, concentrating everything at the new Oceanside plant in the city of Prince Rupert.

Employment

On the Saanich peninsula there has been an active potato growing industry for many years, but because there has been a problem with what is called golden nematodes, the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) has put a ban on the export of those potatoes. The local producers feel they have a reasonable proposal which will help them to save their industry and thereby save 180 jobs. They have asked for a meeting with the minister, but so far he has not even responded to their request. In a community like Victoria where you have 18 industries closing down over a period of a year, you reach a point where there is a critical mass loss, and other industries follow suit.

Again in my riding we have the example of Honeymoon Bay where 356 permanent jobs were lost. The reasons for the closure were fairly obvious. There was an antiquated mill, a shortage of timber supplies and a downturn in markets. Some 40 years ago that was a new mill in a beautiful new stand of timber. I would like to ask you, Mr. Speaker, and through you the other members of this House, if the workers at Honeymoon Bay had had the responsibility for planning the future of their community would they have managed things in this way? Would they have ripped off tremendous profits and sent them down to Vancouver and other metropolitan centres in the United States; creaming the profits and allowing that plant to become antiquated? Would they have followed logging methods which did not take any account of tomorrow? Would they have followed the export policy of sending out huge amounts of timber to be further processed in Japan or Australia rather than demanding that every possible bit of processing be done in British Columbia?

I believe if workers had the opportunity to do some of the planning for their own jobs they would do a darn sight better than the multinational corporations have done so far. They come in, grab the profits, move out and leave the communities bankrupt and the people unemployed.

As a result of this kind of unemployment in major industries, stores, car lots and many secondary parts of our society also suffer. In a modern society such as Canada's, unemployment simply does not happen like the weather but rather is caused by human decisions. Those human decisions are the result of the policies of that government over there.

First of all, at the present time we have high interest rates and we have experienced a fall-off in housing demand in Canada. A decrease in housing demand has a direct effect on plywood and construction workers. High interest rates mean decreased consumer demand, and certainly high interest rates represent a stated, and continually stated, policy of the government opposite.

Second, we have an economy that is dependent on the export of raw or semi-processed resources—a branch plant manufacturing economy. I was interested to hear the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Kelly) say this afternoon that one of the reasons for unemployment is that we have a branch plant manufacturing sector. That sounded almost like something we have been saying for the last several years. Then he went on to say that this had nothing whatever to do with government policy.