

The Budget—Mr. Cassidy

to talk about reducing our unemployment rate by 2 per cent per annum, that is, by reducing the number of our unemployed Canadians by 250,000 per annum year after year until we get down to a level of unemployment which is in fact tolerable and acceptable to all Canadians, not just to the financiers and investment analysts on Bay Street who seem to provide the Minister of Finance with most of his advice.

The facts about unemployment in Canada are very clear. All the projections tell us we will continue to have 1.25 million unemployed Canadians for the foreseeable future. Through no fault of their own, they will live in idleness wondering what they did wrong in order that the economic system can continue to function and so employees are assured of a docile labour force which will not make too many waves.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, when opinion polls are taken, Canadians say that unemployment remain their most important concern. As the Youth Commissioner in Ontario, Mr. Ken Dryden, the former goal tender for the Montreal Canadiens, recently stated in his report: Canadians believe that unemployment is the main problem but the government does not respond. Governments act as they please and do what is possible but unemployment remains at an unacceptable level. If unemployment remains at an unacceptable level, it is too bad for the government. Mr. Speaker, in spite of the social cost of unemployment, in spite of the impact of unemployment on workers who find their life senseless and feel that they are being edged out of society, we are still tolerating an excessive unemployment rate.

Mr. Speaker, apparently social consensus to reduce unemployment is in-existent but it would be advisable to have one. And this is what I am advocating for the New Democratic Party. It is high time for us Canadians to start thinking seriously about our future and follow the lead of countries such as Norway, Sweden, Austria and, up to the 70, West Germany, who decided that a full employment policy is as important as any other objective in terms of political economy.

● (1320)

[English]

That is what I am suggesting we should be doing now. Like other countries, we should go beyond the prevailing situation where unemployment is systemic in Canada and somehow accepted as part of the system. We must change the system and plan for progressive reduction of unemployment to levels that are acceptable and tolerable. I suggest that 9 per cent unemployment across Canada is intolerable, with 13 per cent unemployment in many of our provinces and 19 per cent unemployment in Newfoundland. That is intolerable and the Government must make a commitment now to change that.

I suggest to the Minister of Finance that we are not only talking in abstracts. That may be the way his officials and advisers on Bay Street advise him, but the 1.25 million unemployed are real people.

Anyone who has visited a region of high unemployment knows that the whole community is affected. There is a sense of loss of opportunity, loss of mobility, and loss of dreams. There is no question that the high pool of unemployment that exists today helps to strengthen employers over employees, which can lead to unhealthy situations, to put it mildly, and can also adversely affect our productivity.

There is an intense sense of loss for the unemployed person because our society does not appreciate someone who is unemployed. Work is a major element in most people's lives because it gives them dignity, meaning, income, security, success, and self-esteem. In many ways, it is a major way for them to structure their time and provides a source of friends and social activities. It is difficult to hold up one's head when one does not have a job or know what to do, regardless of whether being unemployed is helping the over-all economic situation in the abstract.

I am sure most Members of Parliament from all Parties have shared my experience of being visited by unemployed people who have told how they feel depressed by that experience. For example, I advertised a job in my riding office a few months ago, for which 180 people applied. That is not an unusual number, and I believe that half of the people who applied were qualified and would have done a good job in the riding office for me and my constituents.

Often, employers do not answer letters from unemployed people. They feel harassed by a requirement in the unemployment insurance regulations by which they must go to a dozen job interviews every week in a depressed region, when they and the unemployment insurance officials know that there are barely a dozen employers in that area and there is no point in continually knocking on the doors if there are no jobs available.

While more humane treatment may help, it is not the answer. The real answer is to have fewer unemployed in our country. We should make the commitment now to lower our unemployment rate to levels that prevail in Europe. I admit that it will not be easy. I also grant that the New Democratic Party will come under close scrutiny for our economic policies in the coming months because of our position in the polls and that we will be contending as a major party in the forthcoming federal election. I will put before the people of Canada our commitment to full employment next to the commitment of the Minister of Finance to reduce the deficit. I believe Canadians will say that if they have a choice, they will choose full employment over whether the deficit is \$28 billion, \$29 billion, or \$30 billion. The experience in countries like Sweden is that the measures that are used to achieve full employment are a good deal less traumatic than the initial commitment to achieve that.

I say honestly that I do not believe that a New Democratic Government can guarantee that every person who is employed will have a job working on a bank of computer terminals with which they control world-wide communications for some multinationals, or that they will have a job devising some new