

The Budget—Hon. J. Marchand

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Marchand (Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Mr. Speaker, before I entered politics, I was always told that unemployment was the favourite food of politicians. Today, I see those who so informed me were quite right. It is not that I want to make a joke of the matter, because I know what it is to be unemployed. I have seen the unemployed and on many occasions I have fought for them, and I am aware that the problem is extremely serious.

However, I do not believe that opposition members have, at any rate so far, made really meaningful contributions to the debate on unemployment. Of course, they have complained about unemployment and denouncing unemployment and inveighing against the present government is a sure way of building up some kind of political prestige. It is easy. Anyone can do this denouncing and I appreciate that it should be done. There is not the slightest doubt about that.

However, I had thought that the opposition would do a little bit more than merely offer vague criticism. I expected them to submit concrete proposals, to tell the House and the Canadian people what policy should be adopted in order to put an end to unemployment and, in fact, to enable almost all Canadians to hold a permanent and remunerative job.

Some hon. members—my attention was drawn, for instance, to the comments of the hon. member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow)—appear to have written their speeches 20 or 25 years ago, taking into account the situation as it was then. Apparently, since then, they are repeating the same speeches, without being aware of the changes that have occurred in our society and without bearing in mind the decisions that have been made. The same stories are told because at the time they were pertinent. Today, however, such utterances have nothing whatever to do with the facts.

One member spoke of Quebec City. Nobody asked him to do so, but he spoke of it. He said that Quebec City has a serious problem because it dumps almost 100 per cent of its raw sewage into the St. Lawrence. However, for the past six or seven years, Mr. Speaker, we have been working with the province of Quebec and with the City of Quebec in order to eliminate the pollution of the St. Charles River. Two water treatment plants are being built; an amount of some 100 million dollars is provided for the treatment of all the small streams which pour into the St. Charles River. All this is being done. It seems that when the hon. member for Winnipeg-North-Centre, pardon me, Winnipeg-North, prepared his speech, this was not being done. That was the only way to bring a member of the New Democratic Party into the House. There is no doubt that unemployment interests the New Democrats, but—Mr. Speaker, I knew that the hon. member would resume his seat after hearing me make such a mistake!

So, Mr. Speaker, here is a man in public life who has just spoken of unemployment, of Canadian problems and who could at least inquire about and know these elementary facts. But it makes a good impression to assert

[Mr. Dinsdale.]

before the Canadian people that absolutely nothing is being done although we would really have a wonderful opportunity to find jobs for our unemployed.

In any event, whatever criticism we may level at the opposition, it nevertheless remains that unemployment is a very serious problem in our society. Is the problem serious because there are 600,000 unemployed rather than 500,000 or 400,000? I am under the impression that any man who is unemployed against his wish, even though he were the only one of his kind, would be thoroughly unhappy and society should come to his assistance. It is not the fact that there are 200,000 or 300,000 which is serious. Obviously, this makes for a greater number of unhappy people, but for the one who finds no work it will not help his situation to hear that his third neighbour is also unemployed.

It is a quite personal problem. Unemployment also becomes a social problem when there is a significant number of workers out of a job.

Mr. Speaker, I would like us one day to have more revealing statistics on unemployment, not because I do not believe that there are 600,000 unemployed—there are perhaps 700,000 or 800,000—but in order to know the truth as it is. I do not intend to minimize the importance of unemployment. We have total figures concealing quite varied realities.

For instance, does the worker who from one place to another has been vainly looking for work in the last six, seven or eight months fit in the same category as, say, the longshoreman who, by the very nature of his job, is unemployed in December and January and gets back to work only in February or March?

Besides, the teacher who stops working in June and starts again in September is in the same situation. Nobody ever thought of considering this man as being out of work during the summer months.

It is also the case of the construction worker who is unemployed for a few months in the year because of the weather and usually, the fact that he is idle for part of the year is taken into consideration when his wages are established.

Then, all these people are put in the same category.

Is the unemployed from Montreal, who has been looking for work for the last six months, in the same category as the fisherman who has to stop fishing in November or December? He is unable to fish. His work year is not the same as that of an urban worker. And everything is mixed up.

Those who work only a few hours a week are numerous. There are not any global figures available for them. But, I think unemployment is such an important problem that more detailed statistics should be required in order to examine them in a more rational way.

Some workers are unemployed because of the nature of the industry they are in. Some industries are seasonal. Is the farmer in the same situation as the secondary industry worker in a city like Toronto?