

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

Hon. Jack Davis (Minister of Fisheries): Mr. Speaker, this is a big country. It is populated by people who make their living in very different ways. People on the east coast, particularly on the Labrador and northeastern coast of Newfoundland, earn their livelihood by fishing and occasionally by sealing. To them, the seal problem, if I may call it that, is a matter of whether they are going to eat well. To people on Canada's west coast it is another spectacle which appears over television, something about which they would like to know a great deal more and something which they are genuinely concerned about. I refer to the possible extinction of a species. They are not directly concerned with sealing as a source of livelihood. For many people on the east coast it provides up to half their income. This is a matter of real concern to them, rather than curiosity or alarm, as is the case with many well-meaning people in other parts of Canada.

Ninety per cent of the correspondence relative to seals comes from foreign countries with a high standard of living. Of the letters that come from Canadian sources, 80 per cent come from Toronto, Vancouver and to a lesser extent Montreal. Very few letters come from the Atlantic region. Nearly all of the latter say that the seal hunt should be continued. Last year we received 1,000 letters from Canadians. Only 2 per cent of those letters came from areas which are heavily dependent on sealing.

Our main concern, where we are considering this hunt which is essential to the Eskimo people, native Indian people and to others living in outport areas, is whether the seal herds will become extinct as a result of hunting. A special committee was set up under Dr. Keith Ronald of Guelph University. It is named by international experts. This committee will be reporting to us within the next few weeks. It is taking an objective look at the whole situation, not only in respect to the animal populations, but also as to the cruelty or otherwise of the hunt. When this report is received, it will be published. We will all have an opportunity to debate it.

With regard to the Canada-Norway agreement, it applies in the North-Atlantic, not in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. We are referring essentially to those seals which are often found outside of Canadian waters. It is necessary to have an agreement with Norway to assure that the total herd is protected. That is the main reason for the Canada-Norway agreement. I believe there should be a debate on this subject. We will shortly have a lot more information from international experts. Meanwhile, I expect the Canada-Norway agreement to work because we will all be relying on international experts to protect the seal herd from extinction.

REGIONAL ECONOMIC EXPANSION—SUGGESTED
RESIGNATION OF MINISTER

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, on December 8 I directed a question to the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Marchand), one of a series of questions I have been putting to the minister lately. It was prompted by the November unemployment figures released by Statistics Canada and it had to do with the growing rate of unemployment in the Atlantic provinces and the failure of the government's regional development policies to have any marked effect.

Out of a sense of frustration, and because of my failure and the failure of other hon. members to get worthwhile answers or information from the minister, I suggested that the hon. gentleman give consideration to resigning because it appears his policies are not working.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McGrath: Perhaps there is no better way of summing up the situation than to quote the Prime Minister of Quebec, as reported on November 20 by Canadian Press, without doubt the most reliable press agency in Canada. The Prime minister of Quebec is reported as saying: Regional disparities . . . have not yet been affected by federal policies after three and one-half years of power. The gaps are still the same, even if there has been slight progress in the case of Quebec.

As I say, what prompted my latest question were the new employment figures. I think it would be worth while to place them on record because they show a continuing and serious escalation. As a matter of fact, a pattern has been developing over the last five years, a period during which regional development policies are supposed to have been taking effect. In the case of the Atlantic provinces as a whole, the figure for November was 9.7 per cent, seasonally adjusted, as rate opposed to 7.6 per cent for the previous year.

The figures break down as follows. The rate for Newfoundland was 11.4 per cent as opposed to 9.1 per cent for the previous year. In Prince Edward Island it was 7.5 per cent as compared with 5.6 per cent for the previous year. In Nova Scotia it was 7.4 per cent as compared with 4.9 per cent. In New Brunswick it was 6.5 per cent as against 6.2 per cent. Newfoundland, with the highest rate of 11.4 per cent, and Prince Edward Island with the second highest rate of 7.5 per cent, are two of the provinces to which substantial sums have been directed under the regional economic expansion policy. The total number of unemployed in the Atlantic provinces stands at 54,000 as compared with 42,000 last year. Increases of this order continue right down the line on the basis of the provincial breakdown.

Is it any wonder we are frustrated? We are frustrated because we are supposed to be witnessing the effects of a regional development policy and our efforts to get meaningful answers from the minister have failed. We are frustrated in our efforts to get the minister to address himself to the fact that despite the pumping of substantial sums of federal money under the regional development program into the four Atlantic provinces, the rate of unemployment continues to increase.

Meanwhile, there has been criticism from the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council, the Atlantic Development Council, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce and economists in the area. I can think of nobody across the country who has had a kind word to say about the way in which the government is going about this program of trying to end regional disparity.

• (10:20 p.m.)

The best we can get from the minister at any time criticism is levelled at the program, or any time the minister attempts to address himself to these criticisms, is veiled threats to withdraw the program. I do not think that is good enough. If the program is worth while, it must