

Speech from the Throne

According to that minister—and I am sorry he is not in the House today—this is the fault of the applicants, who lack expertise in filling out complicated forms.

Mr. Prud'homme: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am sure the Leader of the Opposition would not wish to leave the impression that Mr. Vallières had been hired by the federal government. If that is what he said, I should like to point out that it is untrue; it is not in accordance with the facts.

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is debate; I suggest to the hon. member that he will have an opportunity to participate in the debate and to indicate what he feels the facts to be.

Mr. Stanfield: I did not say that. If the hon. member, who I respect also, will read what I said he will see I did not say that.

The minister's explanation about the difficulties in relation to unemployment insurance payments seems to suggest that since some of the applicants lack expertise in filling out complicated forms the computer does not like certain of these applications and consequently rejects them. But, of course, if a person is plugged in enough to know how to complain to a member of Parliament or articulate enough to write a scathing letter to the editor he may see some action with regard to his payment. The Speech from Throne assures us that no relief from this process is in sight. It says: "The fundamental reform of protective measures which commenced last year with the new Unemployment Insurance Act will continue." Sir, God help the unemployed.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stanfield: I suppose it is only a small percentage of the population which is directly affected, anyway. The minister reassures us as to that. Not everyone has been touched directly by unemployment, and for those who have not, by the government's yardstick, things have never been better. The hon. member for Bruce told us yesterday that things had never been better for the people of this country. This cynicism ignores the reality. If unemployment is not touching everybody personally it is certainly costing everybody who is in employment, money. Cities and provinces are obliged to shoulder welfare costs, costs which rocket when unemployment goes higher, costs which have to be met through additional local taxes. And the cost to the economy in lost productive capacity is staggering. Then, there is the human cost to be considered.

I said about a year ago that protracted uncertainty about government policy and lack of confidence in the government were contributing to a hesitant economy particularly in the case of businessmen who did not know what kind of year they would be facing, did not know under which tax laws they would be living and did not really know whether the government wanted them to stay in business or not. That is not a very good environment in which to create jobs.

The present government certainly has an unenviable record in the amount of alienation it has created in various sectors of the economy. Since 1968 it has alienated the agricultural community by insulting large sections of it, by downgrading the family farm and by trying to turn the

[Mr. Stanfield.]

whole rural way of life into a public utility. This was not its only proving ground for alienation experiments. Consider its success in alienating our native peoples. Since 1968 the government has taken a stance of confrontation with labour just as it has with business. Since 1968 the government has alienated region after region in Canada. It has alienated the west by its disregard for the feelings of western Canadians in the fields of agriculture, resource development and economic growth. It has alienated the central provinces by its rigidity in federal-provincial affairs and by its arrogance generally. It has alienated the Atlantic provinces by its callous disregard of the regional impact of its economic policies and by its total failure in the area of regional disparity. In this field I do not believe even the truest Grit could argue that the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Marchand) has achieved much success, certainly not with half the country presently designated as areas of slow growth. As a climax to his performance, the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion resorted to using the economic mismanagement of his own government as an excuse for lack of progress. "How can you expect much", he said, "when the entire economy is as sluggish as it has been?" Well, Mr. Speaker, the answer is obvious: you cannot expect much in those circumstances.

• (1240)

The Atlantic Provinces Economic Council in its fifth annual review assessed DREE and made some specific criticisms, criticisms that members of the Progressive Conservative party had been making for some time. APEC said that targets had to be established, that regional planning should be directed more within the region, and efforts should be made to broaden the economic base since most manufacturing continues to be resource-oriented. The approach of the federal government in this area must be fully co-ordinated. It is incredibly negligent to have departments working at cross purposes, as we have had since 1968. We need a full assessment of DREE and its failure.

There should be more decentralization of decision making in the government, and certainly this applies in particular to the Department of Regional Economic Expansion. Perhaps if there were more real consultation the department would make fewer costly mistakes and get ahead faster. When faced with this criticism in the House of Commons, the minister made one of the most outlandish arguments that I have ever heard made in the course of defending the government's programs. He said that although the Atlantic provinces were in worse shape in absolute economic terms than they had been before the slow-down, they were really in much better shape relatively because the government's over-all economic slowdown had severely affected the more well to do regions of the country.

The terrible truth, Mr. Speaker, is that that kind of looking glass logic is surely the most emphatic kind of self-condemnation. If the economic slowdown which the government so callously inflicted on this country had a serious impact upon the more well to do parts of Canada, would it not follow that those regions would soon become preoccupied with their own problems? Would this kind of process not lead to a weakening of their will to be the