

Economic Policy

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would like to point out that there is a Standing Order under which all hon. members have the right to wear a hat in the House. Our only obligation is to take it off when we address the Chair. I will be glad to look up the appropriate citation, Mr. Speaker. As the descendant of a Healy and a McDermott and others on the Scottish side, I have to defend the hon. member's right to wear that particular hat.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. The hon. member for York-Simcoe will not have to rise on a point of order. The Chair withdraws its remarks. It has been the practice of the House, and if hon. members are prepared to allow it with unanimous consent I will allow the hon. member for York-Simcoe to wear his Irish hat.

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for your intervention, and I am particularly pleased that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Macdonald) has, in this instance at least, co-operated in my endeavour to pay tribute to my fine native land, Ireland. If I may, I should like to wear my hat in the House on the understanding that if I address you, Mr. Speaker, I will certainly remove it.

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, this recent exchange boggles the mind. Here we are, in the midst of a debate on a motion moved by the Official Opposition expressing concern about unemployment, and the financial spokesman for the Tory party comes into the House and frivolously puts on a ridiculous hat. I say to you as seriously as I can that all Canadians of Irish ancestry who are unemployed hold the hon. member in nothing but contempt for this frivolous indulgence at such a serious time. I mean that. I note that some hon. members are smiling. Perhaps hon. members will be moved by the following statistics. One of the briefs suggested that of the people who attempted suicide in Vancouver between October, 1975, and September, 1976, 45.8 per cent were unemployed. Unemployment to them was not a joke. They did not have time to fool around celebrating St. Patrick's day. For them unemployment was a serious issue. I say through you, Mr. Speaker, to all hon. members that it may be fine for us to smile, to smirk, to kid. We are living well. We are fully employed. We have good incomes. But for the more than one million—in fact, there are almost 1.5 million unemployed—without jobs the situation is serious. Many of them have no income, and unemployment is not something for them to joke about.

● (1630)

Mr. Stevens: Who's joking?

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, from Nanaimo we proceeded up the coast to that beautiful community in British Columbia known as Powell River.

Mr. Pearsall: Hear, hear!

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, I understand that the hon. member opposite who claps represents that community. If he

really represents it he must know that 25 per cent of the community of Powell River is unemployed.

Mr. Pearsall: You are wrong.

Mr. Broadbent: The hon. member suggests I am wrong. I welcome correction. If the hon. member rises and says the rate is 24.6 per cent, I will accept his correction. I tell him that the unemployment level is 25 per cent. We heard people of that community describing their attempts to find jobs. We were told, for example, of the provincial government's decision to do some budget cutting and of the federal government's attempt, allegedly, to co-operate with that budget cutting effort.

The provincial government asked the federal government to change the designation of Georgia Strait to that of an inland water system. I understand a decision has not been reached on that request of the British Columbia provincial government. But what would it mean? What would it do? That proposal, made by the Socred government of British Columbia, would mean, if accepted, cutting back the crews on ferries from 31 to 14 members. It would mean a net loss of employment in the area of 450 jobs. Not only would jobs be affected but, as I was told by seamen at Powell River, Vancouver and Nanaimo, the safety of the passengers on ships would be significantly affected by crew cutbacks since those waters sometimes become rough. That would be the result if the size of ships' crews was cut in half. The Socred government made that proposal to the federal Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang). Knowing our minister's previous attitude on transport, I fear the worst.

We also heard a moving story from a worker who had been laid off from the Texada mines in Powell River. He was dismayed, not at being laid off—for the mine was run down and the iron ore pretty well depleted—but at the way the unemployment insurance people treated him. He had lived in the community for some time and raised his children, and over a period of 20 or 30 years had accumulated his severance pay. When he was laid off he collected his severance pay, and when he applied for unemployment insurance was told he was not eligible. He was told to use up his severance pay to which he had contributed all his life.

Mr. Speaker, why should a man be put in that position? Since he was available for employment, why should he not be entitled to collect unemployment insurance? Under the regulations, if you are unemployed you are eligible for unemployment insurance if you are available for work. He was available for work. Therefore, I do not see why his severance pay should run out before he or any other Canadian should be entitled to collect unemployment insurance. The sole criterion ought to be, is he ready and willing to work? If he is available for work, he should be entitled to collect unemployment insurance.

Mr. Friesen: Right.

Mr. Broadbent: From Powell River we moved on Monday of this week to Vancouver. In Vancouver we heard extensive testimony on the problems of living, with the high unemploy-

[The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier).]