

Alleged Failure to Reduce Unemployment

I hope that within two weeks, as was mentioned by the house leader, we shall be able to introduce in this house the new legislation concerning rural development. I also hope that, before next spring, we shall have a more precise, more adequate legislation, so as to be able to abolish regional disparities especially and provide all the citizens of this country with equal employment opportunities and almost equal opportunities to increase their income. Such is the goal we set ourselves and are efficiently trying to reach, I hope, and we even count on the support of the opposition, if they really want to help the workers, as they say they do.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Roch La Salle (Joliette): Mr. Speaker, the motion now before the house is not intended, as some hon. members might think, to express the opinions of the opposition only or for the sake of opposition. It is recognized that a serious problem exists both by us and the government members. With this thought in mind, I think that our joint consideration of this situation should be adequate proof for all members that, as members of the opposition, we realize the extent of our responsibilities and I hope that we will be able to participate efficiently in the administration of the country.

As I listened to the remarks of the minister, I felt that once this new department is established, we will be in a position to improve the present situation in a remarkable way. We will be glad to welcome this new minister and I think that yesterday the leader of the opposition (Mr. Stanfield) was asking for the establishment of this department as soon as possible. We all agree that if this legislation were presented within the next few days, we would gladly approve it as we feel that it would prove most beneficial to the workers.

● (4:40 p.m.)

Mr. Speaker, yesterday I heard the Minister of Labour (Mr. Mackasey) say, that we will not achieve anything through lamentations and complaints. I quite agree with him, but since we have certain measures to propose and are in favour, the implementation of some projects, I think it would be improper to keep silent and to ignore the present difficult circumstances.

The arguments of the minister were somewhat weak. Indeed, he simply gave me the impression that he was pleased with the present situation, in view of the particularly difficult years we are now going through.

[Mr. Marchand (Langelier).]

To my mind, the motion for a debate on this urgent problem leads us to recognizing the existence of a need and of a danger.

As for the argument of the Minister of Labour yesterday, to the effect that we have known more difficult times, I take the liberty of questioning that. Of course we have known more difficult times, but is that any reason for getting used to this intolerable situation? He gave us figures on unemployment, but as they seem to apply more to years past than to the present, I feel that we were justified in asking for a debate.

Indeed, this debate has a double object, that of recognizing not only that the situation is difficult, but also of finding solutions to unemployment, for in December there were 373,000 unemployed, that is 20,000 more than at the same time last year.

In January 1968, there were 464,000 unemployed and at the present rate of increase there will be about 500,000 unemployed this month. And the worst thing is that 164,000 married men are now without work, that is 18,000 more than last year. In the category of the most productive workers, that is the workers between 20 and 60 years of age, the number of unemployed reaches 300,000. As for those who have been unemployed for over three months, there are 100,000 of them.

In Ontario, unemployment decreased by 4,000 while it has increased by 26,000 in Quebec. The rate of unemployment in the Atlantic provinces was 7 per cent, compared to 6.8 per cent in Quebec and 3 per cent in Ontario. The increase in the number of persons employed in Ontario was 103,000, in the Prairies, 60,000 and in British Columbia, 43,000.

The government must recognize that the rate of unemployment in the province of Quebec remains at a higher level than elsewhere. Several workers in that province will continue to feel the effects of economic discrimination. It is obvious that the students of that province who could not find work had reasons to protest by organizing demonstrations.

This is a national problem, in Quebec as well as in the Atlantic provinces; and as long as the federal government does not show any concern about it, the parties which suggest sensible answers will have a better chance of winning the support of the people.

The situation in Quebec the plight of the Atlantic farmers, rural poverty and manpower retraining, such are the problems which deserve a priority they have certainly