

*Private Members' Business*

my top priority as the member of Parliament for Bonavista—Trinity—Conception and God knows, I have others both as a member representing a constituency and as a federal member with all the other problems we have in this country.

I am very pleased that I am allowed to bring this to the attention of the House. It will point out a number of Canadian families, in this case in Newfoundland, who are, to use an expression, one that is well used and perhaps sometimes not well understood, in dire straits, in desperate conditions, close to having no hope, despair, despondency, lack of respect for themselves, demoralization.

These are harsh words. For the people who I represent here today these are harsh times. It requires some harsh measures.

I do not know what it is I have to do as their link between what they need and what they cannot get. God knows, I have tried enough in this House to get the attention of the ministers responsible. I have written letters, I have presented motions, I have made statements under Standing Order 31, I have asked questions, I have had meetings. I have not been able to achieve what it is I want.

I am at the point where this is a personal wish, a personal thing. It is personal because I consider I am very close to the people who are in need. They live close to where my home town is. Because of that perhaps I know them better on an individual basis than I would if my riding was in another part of Canada.

• (1730)

It is an area that has been affected by an action taken by the government. My motion is, again, to remind the House:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should implement immediate compensation—

That is immediate compensation.

—to address the plight of those Atlantic Canadians affected by the reduction in northern cod who will have lost their jobs but who are unable to qualify for unemployment insurance.

I am referring to the fishing industry. The federal government is responsible for managing the fishing industry, and those people involved are affected by the actions in this management area by the government. It is

my thesis, and I am joined by many in making the conclusion, that therefore the government is responsible for the plight of the people involved and for taking measures to rectify the situation.

I am referring to the plant workers. This morning there were a total of 70 families who were affected. They are on the Bonavista Peninsula. The plant is the FPI plant in Port Union, Newfoundland. The immediate areas affected are Catalina, Bonavista, Melrose, Elliston, Newman's Cove, Amherst Cove, Birchy Cove, Port Rexton, Trinity and about 70 communities.

As you get further from the tip of the peninsula, the communities are affected less. It goes as far as Clarenville, which is 100-odd kilometres away from the plant itself, which is the distribution centre for the area. It is suffering businesswise because of the decision.

The processing plant, because of the northern cod reduction, was shut down on February 21. It is three months since this has happened. I want to go through very briefly the chronology of what has been involved. I will stick to the action that I have been involved in but I know other members, particularly members from Newfoundland and other members from Atlantic Canada, have been equally persistent for their constituents in areas where this has happened to them.

We will hear some of these examples this afternoon. The plant closed on February 21. I understand that it takes time to develop a compensation program. I understand that, but how long does one have to wait for compensation? We are three months into this now. While I asked the first question two days before the plant closed, I did not really expect to have somebody waiting with a compensation package.

The response of the minister of the day, the Minister of Employment and Immigration, ended up by saying: "We are ready to help and do what is possible to alleviate the problem and we will keep on doing this". That gave me some hope.

The day the plant closed, I directed a similar question to the minister of fisheries and asked him about a compensation package. The minister responded: "When we have established exactly what the consequences of this decision are, if there is need for any additional assistance programs it will be forthcoming".