

Employment of Graduate Students

When we look at the unemployment figures amongst the youth, the reason becomes very obvious. In the group aged 14 to 19 years unemployment is higher than in any other group. This is more evident in Quebec and the Maritimes. When we look at the unemployment rate for the next group, those aged 20 to 24, we find the second highest ratio of unemployment compared with the rest of the labour force. I suggest that the reason may be that our educational system and general economic planning have not been adequate to cope with changing conditions. In the past, tremendous stress has been placed on students going through university. This has been done to such an extent that anybody who has not gone to university has been virtually written off as a drop-out and regarded as a non-productive individual. That is very wrong, Mr. Speaker.

• (8:10 p.m.)

Great progress in the area of vocational training was initiated by the former Conservative government a decade ago. These institutions are now overcrowded and graduates from them are finding difficulty obtaining employment. In addition, a large segment of our youth still has not attended any institution of higher learning. Yet these young people also need to earn a living. Secondly, many adults have not had the advantage of university of vocational training and they are being discriminated against as a result of the increase in unemployment.

I would like to make a few comments about this situation and refer particularly to northern parts of the country. I think it is fair to say that in the north, particularly among the population of native ancestry, unemployment is higher than among any other group in Canada, including groups in Quebec or the Maritimes. There has been a complete and dismal failure on the part of the government to take any effective action in this particular area. From personal knowledge gained through living among and near native peoples, Indians and Metis, unemployment among them is probably higher than 50 per cent. As a matter of fact, at times it comes close to 90 per cent and even 100 per cent in some communities. These figures are not reflected in the statistics of the Department of Manpower; many of these people have reached the point where they do not bother applying to manpower offices because such applications have repeatedly led nowhere. On many occasions they certainly have not led to employment for native peoples.

There is another problem in the area of preparing these people for jobs which are created. A good example is northeastern Alberta, where unemployment among the native peoples is probably higher than 50 per cent. Within the past five years a huge oil refinery was established in the geographic centre of my riding and this created hundreds of jobs. While it was being established, many of the local residents, particularly the natives, literally jumped with joy at the prospect that finally jobs would be available to them.

The plant is now operating but unemployment among the native population remains at the same level. People were brought in from outside to fill the jobs which were

[Mr. Yewchuk.]

created. The basis for this action was that local residents were not trained or equipped to handle most of the jobs that were considered to be technical. Even though there were some vocational training facilities in the area, the preparation of the local population was found to be inadequate. As a result, the local population was virtually bypassed by the job opportunities which had been created. These remarks are not meant in any way to express dissatisfaction with the people who came in and took the jobs. They are all extremely good, useful and productive citizens and we are all very happy to have them.

The development of the north is creating one of the greatest possibilities for employment. However, so long as the government fails to recognize the needs of the local people, and fails to institute a vocational training program for them when employment opportunities are developing, unemployment among them will continue forever. When massive unemployment among any group of the population exists, it is accompanied by all the horrors and tragedies associated with chronic, widespread poverty among adults and chronic despair and pessimism among the youth.

If I may change the subject for a moment, in recent years, as a result of this government's policies, we have witnessed another phenomenon, that of the abandonment of hundreds and hundreds of small farms, particularly throughout the Prairies. This situation has released thousands of people from a vocation to which they have been accustomed, onto a labour market which does not have sufficient jobs even for those who were not in farming and already are part of the labour force. There is no specific plan of action to assist people leaving the farm and attempting to seek another way of life in urban areas. This is probably one of the greatest errors the government is making.

An hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yewchuk: It coldly sits back and says, "This farm is not economical; let us wipe it out", forgetting completely the tragedies which will befall the farm family when it is forced off the farm as a result of poor economic policies. When it gets to the city, it will find that conditions are no better. These families will find a shortage of housing as well as a shortage of jobs.

What are the possible solutions to these problems? First, the direction of education must be reassessed. Our attitude toward education must be reassessed. Students must be made to feel that this country needs them whether or not they go to university. The best way we can do this is to make sure they can obtain jobs and are able to make a living. Young people must be made to feel that taking vocational training is also desirable and respectable. Those who do not take either university or vocational training must be made to feel they are useful human beings and that this country has a need for them. It is therefore necessary to aim education in the direction that will not only broaden one's horizons but will make sure that whatever education a person obtains will enable him to earn a living in any area of Canada. This,