The disastrous unemployment statistics published earlier this year show 989,000 people unemployed and probably another half a million so-called hidden unemployed, at least hidden from the minds of this uncaring Liberal government.

In Nova Scotia the figures indicate that 11 per cent of the labour force is unemployed. That figure is now probably closer to 14 per cent. In Prince Edward Island there are over 12 per cent unemployed, and in New Brunswick well over 13 per cent. In Newfoundland, according to official statistics, at least 15.2 per cent of the work force are unemployed. In all, over 300,000 people are unemployed in the four Atlantic provinces. That is a disgraceful situation in a country with the wealth and human resources we have.

As we follow this monetarist economic policy which is laid down for us by the United States, we are not only getting higher unemployment, we are also experiencing higher inflation, instead of the lower inflation promised by this policy of high interest rates. Inflation is not being reduced. This is evidenced by the massive increase in the cost of living in Atlantic Canada. In Prince Edward Island the consumer price index increased by 13.4 per cent between October, 1980, and October, 1981. In the same period, inflation went up 8 per cent in St. John's, Newfoundland, 12.1 per cent in Saint John, New Brunswick, and 11.4 per cent in Halifax. This compares with a national average of 9.1 per cent.

● (2010)

There seems to be no plan for stimulating the industry or investment in Atlantic Canada even though the major employer, particularly in Newfoundland, has seen a drastic reduction in investment in the fishing industry, from $91 million in 1979 to $53.4 million this year. While we do not like to dwell on the negative, I think it is worth while once again to remind the government, which has some ability to change economic conditions in this country, that it has some responsibility to Atlantic Canada as well as to the rest of the nation.

An hon. Member: This government has no ability.

Mr. Miller: It lacks ability but we hope it will develop some ability soon.

An estimated one-half of the 6,000 students graduating from Nova Scotia universities each year have to go elsewhere for employment, not because they want to leave the Atlantic provinces but because they must. They have been doing that for generations.

The federal government recently reduced the number of civil servants in Prince Edward Island by 138. This again is a blow to that economy caused by this budget. VIA Rail cutbacks will result in the loss of 280 jobs in Atlantic Canada, and will create more difficulty for employees and passengers.

Consolidated Rambler Mines is planning to shut down its copper mine at Baie Verte, Newfoundland, resulting in some 900 workers being laid off. This is a direct result of the high interest rate policy followed by the federal government and, I might say, followed by the Reagan government in the United States.

The unemployment picture in Atlantic Canada is disgraceful, and we have a government which seems unable to do anything to improve a situation that has been continuing for many years. While there are more statistics that could be quoted, I think, as my colleague the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans) indicated earlier in the day, we really do not often put a face on the picture of unemployment. Today the NDP caucus met with representatives of the Canadian Labour Congress. Its representatives will be here on the weekend to add, hopefully, a very loud and strong voice to the protest of government economic policy as well as the government's interest rate policy. Regardless of the number of people who show up for the demonstration in front of Parliament on Saturday, you can be sure that tens of thousands of other people wish they could be in Ottawa to pass a message on to the government but who cannot afford to travel being on unemployment insurance or on human resources welfare.

Let me recount some of the stories we heard from members of the delegation who met with us today. A member from the Newfoundland Federation of Labour indicated that from 37 per cent to 40 per cent of the people belonging to that federation are unemployed. We were told that two mines were to be closed down, throwing many more people out of work. Probably compounding the problem extensively is the fact that the pension plan, to which the employees of one of those mines had contributed $1.5 million, was going to be lost to those members and there is no money with which to pay the pensions.

We were told that another mine was to be closed down because the company could make more money by putting its capital in the bank. That company was prepared to do that even though it meant throwing people out of work and on unemployment insurance. In this way the company can make more profit through bank interest, instead of putting the capital to work.

The fishing industry this year in Newfoundland was the worst it has ever been because of a combination of poor inshore and offshore fisheries stocks and federal government mismanagement. If Fonse Faour were part of the NDP now we would probably have very good representation from Newfoundland. That industry, which is the backbone of the Newfoundland economy, experienced a disastrous year, and the answer of the government to that loss of revenue was a $1.5 million make-work project so that people would have enough weeks of work to be eligible for unemployment insurance. That was inadequate but the best this government could do.

An hon. Member: A band-aid.

Mr. Miller: As my colleague points out, it was band-aid treatment for the economy.

Not only are the fishing and mining industries in trouble, the forestry industry in this country is facing difficulties. Our forest industry is the main exporter of this nation and the main revenue producer for provincial and federal governments.