

The Address—Mr. Plourde

How much of the decrease was due to the policy of the former government in giving capital grants for technical school construction and the setting up of upgrading and re-training courses, to prevent the labour market being flooded with young and untrained people? How much of the decrease was due to a winter which was unusually favourable for winter construction? Will summer construction slow down due to over-building during the winter by large firms which had the capital to take advantage of the coming change in sales tax, and other incentives? Will the small contractor curtail his activities during the summer season because of his unfavourable competitive position due to the graduated sales tax?

I think the complacency of the government is premature. It is disappointing to rural members, as indeed to all hon. members, that the government has no policy for agriculture. It is apparently going to allow the sound and long term policies of the former government to wither. Agriculture, once again under a Liberal government, is becoming the forgotten segment of the economy.

[Translation]

Mr. Lucien Plourde (Quebec West): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased once again to make the voice of Quebec West heard in this house.

On the last day of the throne speech debate, it affords me pleasure to join with all my previous colleagues in extending my warmest congratulations to the mover (Mr. Cote, Longueuil) and seconder (Mr. Basford) of the address in reply to the speech from the throne.

All Canadians have been disappointed in that speech, because they expected at least that a more dynamic position would be taken with regard to the evil of unemployment, which has become a problem of prime importance, as well as to the lack of purchasing power aggravated by the lack of jobs.

When I read press reports that would have the people believe that unemployment is declining, that it is merely seasonal unemployment, I am amused, because I know that the present unemployment, far from declining, has become chronic and prevails the year round. In the province of Quebec, a percentage of 7.5 has more particularly been mentioned, according to a Montreal daily, which later had the audacity to say that unemployment was still on the decrease.

Mr. Speaker, let us look at the facts. What does that percentage mean? Well, it only comprises those who were lucky enough to receive unemployment insurance benefits properly so-called. But how many other

[Mr. Clancy.]

people without jobs cannot obtain unemployment insurance benefits for one reason or another which some civil servants endeavour to find?

I am myself acquainted with the case of the head of a family with eight children, who had to be hospitalized. That same man, after having paid his contributions to the unemployment insurance fund for 17 consecutive years, did not get any benefit payments, because the unemployment insurance office in Quebec denied him that right by saying that, being unable to work at the time, he was not entitled to benefit from unemployment insurance. This is quite logical in itself, but the terrible thing is that this same head of family who does not know where to turn to feed his dependents is denied aid by the social services where he cannot find any help as long as they have not received an official copy from the main unemployment insurance office in Montreal, confirming that this man with a dependent family is not entitled to unemployment insurance benefits, though the office is perfectly aware of his not being able to get anything for the next two, three or four weeks.

Mr. Speaker, I think that we have here a blatant case of injustice to those people who have shouldered the burden of providing the necessary money to feed and maintain their family. They pay a contribution for many years, and when the time comes when benefits, or help from a social agency are needed, they get the answer: "Quite impossible, sir". Meanwhile, let them try to help themselves by getting into debt. Everything is done to discourage a man with a family.

Here is a man out of work with nine dependents and who, as far as the state is concerned, is not unemployed, since he is not entitled to benefits. How many similar cases are there? Undoubtedly hundreds of them.

On the other hand, persons out of work who draw unemployment assistance are also not considered as being unemployed. Nevertheless, they actually are unemployed. In the province of Quebec, the number of such cases reported in the press is frightening, it is a frightful figure. It is then realized how many thousands of families which have received unemployment assistance are not considered as being unemployed.

The authorities are aware of these facts, but what do they do to cope with the situation? Nothing tangible except deliver sonorous speeches to make people believe that unemployment is unavoidable for thousands of reasons.

When the Minister of Finance (Mr. Gordon) introduced his budget last year, he tried to have the people of Canada believe