

*Alleged Failure to Reduce Unemployment*

put in order, unless the government acts decisively to restore confidence in the economy, the situation may well get worse before it gets better.

Where will the economy be next spring? So far as we can now tell, the rate of economic growth will still be below the minimum acceptable rate, inflation will still be unacceptably high, and unemployment will still be high. So far as we can judge from many of the things the Minister of Finance has said, a year from now we will still be waiting for some kind of budgetary statement from him giving us an idea of where the country stands. All this against the background of the preceding three or four years when the performance has been far short of the potential of our country.

The December unemployment figures are bad enough on the national average when compared with the figures for the previous month. But when you have a 7.1 per cent unemployment rate in the Atlantic provinces and a 6.8 per cent unemployment rate in Quebec, surely that adds to the seriousness of the problem. I am well aware that unemployment rates in the Atlantic provinces have been traditionally high, but surely it is intolerable for the government to temporize any longer with the policies promised now for seven or eight months in the field of regional development.

The Prime Minister and his associates were glib enough about regional disparity during the election campaign. There were promises of a Marshall plan for the slow growth areas. Where are these policies? When we ask straightforward questions about regional disparity in this house and about the high level of unemployment in Quebec and the Atlantic provinces, we are told by the minister responsible that he will deal with these matters when he brings in his bill establishing the new department. I say to my hon. friends: Bring it in now. What is the government waiting for? This house has dealt with a wide variety of legislation, some of it important, some of it rather routine and less urgent in terms of the impact upon the suffering of thousands of Canadians. If there are policies that this government has to help overcome regional disparity and to fight the particularly high unemployment rates in some parts of the country, we are entitled to see these policies, and the government is obliged to implement them without further delay.

So far, we have heard rumours that the Atlantic Development Board is to be dismantled and turned into some kind of anaemic

[Mr. Stanfield.]

advisory board. It is time that the minister and the government put an end to the speculation and gave an honest statement of their intentions. The views of this party, its program with regard to regional development, are well known, and I would be happy to elaborate on them at any time for my hon. friends.

There are other regional problems in the country. There are the acute problems of western agriculture and they affect employment in that part of the country and in the country as a whole as the problem backs up. The agricultural community in western Canada does not yet believe the government is even concerned about their problems. Consequently, confidence in the future of agriculture is wanting. I simply say today that in terms of the economy of the whole country, as well as in terms of that part in Canada, it is important that the government act to restore confidence. This requires an end to the uncertainties surrounding the economic policies of the government. I hope this motion carries with it clearly the implication that confidence in Canada's economy, confidence in the competence of the government to manage the economy, is very much at stake at the present time.

• (3:50 p.m.)

This motion demands the disclosure of the economic policies of the government. It demands to know how the government proposes to go about the urgent task of getting the country into a position where we can attain our reasonable potential for growth this year and in the years ahead, as well as making up some of the ground lost in the last few years. The country neither expects nor requires a flawless and detailed blueprint for economic success, but surely it is entitled to know the main outlines of the government's economic policy after nine months in office of this so-called new regime.

Surely, it is not enough to abandon existing programs, whether in connection with winter works or in the fisheries field or in science, citing their shortcomings which everybody knew about, and then begin to look for new programs. Surely, it erodes confidence to talk about restraint and then to produce an accounting in which the deficit is higher by hundreds of millions of dollars than had been expected. Surely, in this vital area of economic policy, involving the question of confidence which is so closely related to growth, it is foolhardy to try to get by with bland statements that trade policy is under review that