

*Employment Programs*

[English]

Where do we go from here? Many suggestions have been made and there will be others. The Progressive Conservative party advocates an immediate espousal of the economic goals enunciated by the Economic Council of Canada. We demand immediate action to return the Canadian economy to a path of full employment.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Comeau:** What does the Prime Minister propose to solve the problems created by the mushrooming labour force? On his recent Niagara Peninsula tour the Prime Minister announced that in a free society people had to be prepared to accept trade-offs, and consequently the emphasis should be on getting jobs for Canadians who want to work, a shorter work week, much earlier retirement, delays in young people entering the work force, and less pressure to get women working. Such a theory is in glaring contradiction to the present practices of the government. Consider the unemployment insurance legislation to provide unemployment benefits for pregnant women as an incentive to them to return to their jobs! Obviously, the Prime Minister is not laying a basis for new government policies, but rather is using scare tactics to convince the public that the weapons he ultimately chooses to fight employment are the only desirable means for combatting the problem. The essence of such a ploy is that it admits of only the extremes, and implicitly rejects the possibility of any middle ground.

It is not possible that a lesser degree of unemployment and a low degree of inflation could co-exist in a free society? All kinds of suggestions have been made in the last couple of years about how this objective could be achieved and I do not need to repeat them. I only need to point out to the Minister of Finance that if he would listen and try a different course every now and then he may find that the results would not be worse than the results of some of the policies advocated by the government. Such a course might be worth while.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Comeau:** There are many respectable economists who think that such co-existence is indeed possible, and who also maintain that the Prime Minister's economic policies up to the present have been as disturbing as these new scare tactics. In its zealotry to get Canada the first prize in the 1970 international competition against inflation, the Liberal government pursued policies that earned for Canada the international booby prize for unemployment and also one of the poorest records in reaching potential gross national product.

Something has to be done, Mr. Speaker, and in view of the fact that the budget is to be presented within a couple of weeks, I hope this debate today will indicate to the Minister of Finance and the government that it is time to try something new, something that will give this country full employment. Canadians will not settle for anything less. Students who are graduating have been told along the way, "You go to university and we will take care of you". Now, they find that we are not able to provide for

[Mr. Comeau.]

them. The situation is frustrating to Canadians of all ages, those over 65 and those in the middle age group. Within the last couple of years, we have passed legislation forcing Canadians to retire at 55 years of age. These people are forced out of the labour force and cannot come back because of the situation that exists. Just last night there was a program on television about executives in the 35 to 50 age group who cannot find employment in their line of work, or in any other line for that matter.

We cannot go on talking about the constitution forever. We cannot blame everything on the constitution. We cannot go on being academic, pretending that we are living in a university or that we are lecturing to university students. As politicians in this country we have to be practical, and we have to face the problem.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Comeau:** There is no need for me to review the events of the last two or three years, Mr. Speaker. We only have to look back at the legislation that has been passed. The Criminal Code has been amended about 150 times; we have talked about this constitution; we have talked about many things, but the government has not once listened to suggestions for getting the economy moving and getting people back to work. I hope the Minister of Finance will not be too proud to admit his failures, but will want to listen and, when he presents his budget on June 18, will want to take the measures necessary to correct the injustices that have been caused by this government in the last couple of years.

• (3:30 p.m.)

Other members of my party will talk about different aspects of this subject. Some will deal with—

**An hon. Member:** With the facts.

**Mr. Comeau:** —the opportunities for youth program. Others will talk about university graduates, the labour force and so on. I end by repeating what I said at the beginning. We need full employment so that we may offer Canadians generally, including our young Canadians, a chance to make a decent living in this country. I have not participated in debates on the economy for some time. I have tried to give this government a chance. The situation has become more and more frustrating. I assure you, Mr. Speaker, that I, as a private member, and my party cannot condemn this government enough for the policies it has followed in the last three years.

**Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the motion moved by the hon. member for South Western Nova (Mr. Comeau) and to offer my congratulations for his forceful and frank speech. It was needed. It was a speech that presented the problem faced by this country in a very adequate fashion indeed.

The single most important source of discontent and disunity in this country today is that presented by the current levels of unemployment. In recent weeks there has been, throughout Canada, a mounting criticism of welfare spending, a mounting criticism of spending in education and an increased criticism directed at the pro-