

The Budget—Mr. Cassidy

Let me put it in another way. The Government told us in the Throne Speech last year, with some pride, that the average income of Canadian families rose in real terms in 1985 for the first time in five years. Good for us. The averages are encouraging. However, I am reminded of the economist who drowned in a pond the average depth of which was 7.5 inches. That is the situation for an awful lot of Canadian families. Averages made by people who tool around the streets of Etobicoke in BMWs and Jaguars do not put bread on the table for a lot of average Canadians. In 1985, the average family income in Ontario was \$41,765. That was 40 per cent higher than the average in Newfoundland and most other Atlantic provinces. In other words, we have the contrast between the rich and the poor in this country and the Government does not feel it is worth looking at.

The Government has to deal with regional disparities. If the Throne Speech is any indication, the Government is aware of the problem. I remember responding positively when I heard the Governor General read the Government's words in the Throne Speech, and I quote, "that regional disparity remains an unacceptable reality of Canadian life." Somehow it seems that the Government's position is the same; it is unacceptable but it is not going to do anything about it. It is not just the fact that unemployment rates are intolerably high in seven or eight of our provinces, it is the fact that the Government has done so little to try to correct those disparities and to provide leadership and a sense of hope in many parts of our country.

Between the year the Government came to power and this year, far from increasing its commitment to combating regional disparity the Government retreated in the face of regional disparities, and between 1984-85 and the forthcoming fiscal year it is cutting \$3 billion or something like 25 per cent from the budget of the Department of Regional Industrial Expansion and other regional and economic development programs. That is a tribute to Tory economic policies. The Government says regional disparity is an unacceptable reality, but its actions perpetuate those regional disparities. The Prime Minister told his constituents in Sept-Îles last weekend that the Budget was going to be thin on measures for regional development. We know he is often prone to hyperbole and I accuse him of that in this case. This Budget was not thin in what it did for regional economic development, it was non-existent.

You cannot maintain that any kind of meaningful economic recovery is taking place outside of Manitoba under an NDP Government, in southern Ontario where the NDP have also had a substantial influence, and in the region around Montreal. How quickly is that situation going to end? What is the Government going to do about it? What did it mean when it said that regional disparity was unacceptable? When I talked to Department of Finance officials, they said, "we are not going to do anything much because unemployment is going to stay at 9.2 per cent. In January of this year—you are motioning, Mr. Speaker, concerning extending the hour?

• (1300)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap (Mr. Riis) asked that the Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Cassidy) be given time equal to that given to the member of the Official Opposition. That was granted by the House. We also agreed to proceed with the question and comment period after Question Period. However, does the Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre wish to obtain unanimous consent to continue his speech at this time?

Mr. Cassidy: I would hope to have consent to continue at this time, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Very well. The Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Cassidy: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to resume what I was saying. I will give a final statistic. There is a danger of going too heavily into statistics, but this one is telling. In January, 1987, there were 1,342,000 unemployed across Canada. That was a reduction of 5,000 from January, 1986. If every year we manage to eliminate 5,000 people from the unemployment rolls, were the Government given the time, which it will not be, in a mere 270 years we will succeed in wiping out unemployment in Canada. That is not in our lifetime, and it is certainly not good enough for average Canadians. Canadians want and deserve more than that. We cannot stay the course for 270 years, and no one wants to stay a course like that.

In vast areas of Canada in the future, more than 10 per cent of our workforce will be unemployed at any one time. Fifteen to 20 per cent of our young people are out of a job. I recognize that perhaps 10 per cent of the people unemployed today will be unemployed in a year's time. However, one family in four will have someone unemployed during the next 12 months. Half of us will likely have a close friend, a close relative or a neighbour who will be unemployed. Unemployment is becoming a pervasive fact of life which touches almost every Canadian home. It influences almost every decision. It undermines people's confidence, dignity, sense of worth, sense of purpose and ability to get on with their lives which, after all, is what the economy is all about.

Canadians say they want fairness. They say that it is not fair that corporations and rich Canadians get tax breaks while taxes keep increasing for the average family. They know it is not fair when Finance Ministers wring their hands but do nothing while chronic unemployment continues to blight the lives of 1.25 million Canadians. That is how many Canadians will be unemployed well into the 1990s with the economic policies of the Government.

Canadians do not accept the excuse that it is all right to have high unemployment because sometime in the future we will start to do better. That is very clear from the polls today