

Regional Unemployment

cerning the recommendations made by the government of Quebec. One wonders after why Quebecers are so concerned today and so frustrated about the current system. It is not the system or federalism as it is which is bad, Mr. Speaker, but the way it is applied. It was not applied properly.

Someone has suggested earlier to let the federal government establish priorities at the provincial level. I am against that because the provinces have not really contributed enough to important decisions. The minister underlined the importance of better cooperation between various departments and it is certainly a necessity but the cooperation of provinces is also needed to establish a dialogue between them and set priorities. Then, the federal government will be a complement to the desires and aspirations of provinces. I do not speak only for Quebec, actually—

An hon. Member: Like a federal-provincial conference!

Mr. La Salle: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member for Labelle has something to say later, he will certainly get the floor. But as soon as they are criticized for having maintained a silence which is awkward and disappointing for Quebecers, they take the floor. Of course, they do not like it.

But the CBC, anyone, will be made responsible for the present situation when this government has been in power for 12 years. Twelve years ago, this government was supposed to deal with unemployment. There were 168,000 unemployed in 1968 and there are one million now but, nevertheless, some people dare say that Quebecers are privileged and not so unfortunate. No, Mr. Speaker, I do not think we could commend this government for its performance until now.

I could mention the north shore, northern Quebec where people are living far from large centres and penalized because of their geographic situation. I do not think that this government can refuse to consider giving compensation to these areas because of their geographic situation. Heating and transportation costs are higher, industries are less and less interested to go there because competition is more difficult. As members of parliament we have asked the government to consider the difficulties of the people living in remote centres and we are aware of their problems. I think that the Department of Regional Economic Expansion could bring about some solutions. An unemployment rate of 20 per cent has been mentioned for Témiscamingue, and in Gaspesia it stands at 25 per cent, the highest unemployment rate in Canada.

● (1750)

My area will reach the 20 per cent mark the way things are developing. It is important in my view that we reconsider this now, and DREE has the tool to do it, namely the setting up of designated areas. Recently, in Montreal, the minister referred to the possibility of investing millions of dollars in the metropolitan area. He recognized the problems now faced by Montrealers and the increasing unemployment rate.

This is important in my view, so I urge that the Montreal region be declared as soon as possible a designated area. Mr. Speaker, there is something I have never been able to under-

[Mr. La Salle.]

stand. I was put in the Montreal-Mirabel corridor, and I call that taking quite a roundabout way. My constituency like many others is now in the throes of serious difficulties. We must urge the government to apply very special, short-term remedial measures in areas where the unemployment rate is the highest. Of course, we will be criticized for asking this at this point. But, in my view, we are committed to do so. We are also committed to remind the government that people are suffering, not only in the province of Quebec but throughout Canada. My colleagues have mentioned this before, and others will again. So, as far as my area is concerned, I will certainly take this opportunity to ask the minister to consider reviewing the issue of currently designated areas as related to those that are now experiencing worse difficulties. Reference was made to the Montreal area. My area is also having difficulties. There are districts where the unemployment rate is reaching disastrous levels. We certainly are aware of that.

DREE's main objective was to take care of regional disparities. In all fairness, I do not believe this government deserves any commendation for the result it has achieved. Of course, some will say that the government has spared no efforts, that it has invested money, that it has worked hard, that it has made studies. This is not enough, and I say definitely not enough, and when people talk about our million unemployed workers, especially in Quebec, there is concern about the close-down of a number of plants and about the fact that the government has failed to study or plan to save Canadian industries.

Mr. Béchard: Others will be closed!

Mr. La Salle: The hon. member for Bonaventure-Îles-de-la-Madeleine talks about the closing of yet other plants. This does not worry him, but it does worry me, Mr. Speaker, to see that plants are now closing down in Quebec. A decent and respectful government has no right to hesitate one moment to offer something to the Quebec government, and to all of the provinces. Since I am speaking about Quebec, I believe that this government should immediately offer concrete proposals to the Quebec government. This government should dare the Quebec government to refuse! Then the people of Quebec will be in a position to pass a judgment on their government.

Mr. Béchard: The industries do not want to stay in Quebec!

Mr. La Salle: I hope that this government will immediately offer the provinces—and especially Quebec in view of the present dangerous situation—ideas, legislation and possible investments, and that it will concentrate its efforts not only on keeping open the plants that we now have, but also on saving the industrial community in Quebec and Canada and on taking steps to create additional jobs. Of course, there is Canada Works and Young Canada Works. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been voted for these programs, but this is no insurance for the future, Mr. Speaker. These measures are merely remedial in character and we are forced by the circumstances to accept them. I am happy that some of those projects are being funded in my constituency, but it is not an insurance for the future, not only of Quebec, but also of Canada. I