

have known perfectly well last spring that unless the government took steps at that time to increase economic activity in Canada we would be in the fix that we are going to be in this winter. And believe, me, Mr. Speaker, we will be in a fix. I do not say that with the slightest degree of pleasure, but rather with profound regret at the government's failure to listen to what obviously is economic good sense. Even though the government wished to implement nineteenth, perhaps even eighteenth century economic policies, it should have had the elementary sense to start improving economic conditions six or eight months ago with the hope that by this winter the situation in the country would have improved. It did not do so. There was no plan and there never is. So you drift along and come to the winter with the kind of unemployment that is now being forecast.

● (3:20 p.m.)

I want to use my last two or three minutes to put the following suggestion on record. There are some things that ought to be tried immediately. They will not serve to cure the unemployment problem this winter and they will not even serve to reduce the number of unemployed very substantially, but they will serve to give jobs to perhaps 50,000 or 100,000 people. Saving the dignity and the lifestyle as well as the self respect of even 50,000 or 100,000 unemployed is important if you are concerned with human life and human dignity. It is worth doing these things to reduce unemployment by at least the number it can be reduced.

I propose first that the federal government should immediately call a federal-provincial conference on the subject of unemployment and none other, and that the federal government should encourage the provincial governments to bring to that conference representatives of the major municipalities in their provinces. I do not care whether these are ministers or officials, as I am not interested in protocol. I am interested in getting together spokesmen for the federal government, for the provinces and the municipalities, to sit down and work out some concrete things that can be done this winter to reduce unemployment, particularly in the major industrial centres of this country.

There are things to do. There are schools and hospitals which could be built. There are sewage plants required and there is some roadwork that in some parts of Canada could be done in the winter, although not in many areas. There are jobs of that kind that the three levels of government could arrive at, not with any exaggerated objective but with the perfectly practical objective of creating in each industrial centre in this country another few thousand jobs and thereby remove those people from the unemployment rolls.

I suggest secondly that special programs of this sort ought to be aimed at the highly industrialized centres of the province of Quebec. I said during our debate on the War Measures Act and at other times, and I say now, that as one member of this House and as one Canadian I believe it is vital at this stage of Canada's history to pay particular attention to the social and economic distresses

of that province in order to remove at least some of the soil in which extremism can and does grow.

Employment Programs

Third, I suggest there should be a real change in the way in which the Department of Regional Economic Expansion is functioning at the moment. My inquiries in several areas across the country from people in municipal office, people who are members of various advisory councils, committees and what not, have persuaded me that there now lie on the desks of officials of the Department of Regional Economic Expansion many projects on paper which have been prepared for municipalities in the provinces. These programs could be started tomorrow if the bureaucratic red tape were cut and if the Department of Regional Economic Expansion stopped bickering about little details that stand in the way of getting them underway. Perhaps more thousands of unemployed could be saved this winter.

I have only this suggestion and one other, then I am through. I suggest an immediate increase in old age pensions. The old age pensioner uses every penny he gets in consumption and he cannot save a thing. Therefore, any increase in old age pensions is an immediate increase in the demand for goods and services, and is an immediate stimulus to the production of those goods and services in the country. That is one of the best and most clear ways of making sure that every dollar given is a dollar that goes into the consumption cycle and therefore into the industrial and services production cycle.

Finally, I was heartbroken to hear the Minister of Labour say categorically earlier today that he does not intend to make any change in the unemployment insurance arrangements. This is a great and heartbreaking pity. I cannot see any reason, if we are to have large numbers unemployed this winter, why the government could not immediately increase unemployment insurance benefits to \$100 per week, as is proposed in the White Paper, and extend the period of eligibility for those who have exhausted their benefits in accordance with the present rules, so that at least the months of this winter will be covered. This would not solve unemployment in the winter months, but at least some unemployed in the winter months would be covered and this would be doing the human and decent thing. It would make it possible for the unemployed to live more decently and also it would prevent the kind of despair that leads to unrest.

We placed this motion on the order paper not just to have a motion for debate, but because of our conviction that precisely at the time when the country has faced a crisis of the sort we have been discussing for weeks, it is necessary to bring ourselves back to the fundamentals in society and to look at the social and economic consequences of this very desperate problem of unemployment now as well as the greater unemployment during the coming winter.

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, there can be no question but that we are confronted in this country with the prospect of a serious unemployment problem this winter. It is difficult, if not