

*Supply—Regional Development*

was with a heavy heart that many of them decided to write off their homes and their investment in the community, with its schools, its hospital and all the other necessary requirements of a town of 12,000 or 14,000 people. But since they could not provide their families with a livelihood on Bell Island, they decided to move elsewhere. Many others feared the consequences of such a move. They were uncertain about what they would face if they left the security of their homes, hesitant to move out into the world for which they had not been trained and whose problems they were not prepared to meet. Many people preferred to stay.

This brings me to the point of my remarks. After two years of failure on the part of the federal government and the provincial governments to come to grips with this problem, Bell Island stands today, and I hope the minister hears my remarks, as a mute testimony to bureaucratic bungling and government inefficiency.

The government has failed to meet this problem right in our own environment. A community of 6,500 is still resident on Bell Island, the vast majority of whom are living on relief. This, to me, indicates a complete incapacity on the part of the government of this country to live up to its responsibilities. Poverty is no longer a problem of regional disparity. It is widespread, it is national. I have no less an authority for saying this than that of the economic advisory council. Hon. members are probably familiar with the fifth annual report of the Economic Council of Canada which brings this national disgrace into focus. Canadians will continue to live in poverty in this country as long as we have a government, as long as we have bureaucracy, which does not have the heart to take seriously conditions such as exist today on Bell Island.

I have seen poverty, as have other hon. members. It is a relative thing. It is what you make it. Poverty, to my mind, is not the starvation of Biafra, tragic as that may be. Poverty is the problem of Canadians who have been deprived of their national heritage, deprived of their pride, deprived of their right to earn a living. Poverty to me is a situation where children are brought up in environments where their parents have no opportunity to work. Heads of families are degraded by public welfare, people are being destroyed before our very eyes. There are people who are dead; they are dead because they have no other source of income, save a government

[Mr. McGrath.]

cheque which comes to them once a month and for which they have to plead that they are in poverty. Mr. Chairman, the minister who will be speaking to the house tonight hopefully will have something to say about this matter. How can we deny that there is a situation, when there are 6,500 Canadians who are on relief. These people are ignored by the government of Canada, they are ignored by the government of their own province and they are ignored by a minister who does not see fit to listen to my remarks. Yet, this supposedly is a government in a just society. It is a government, within the ministry of which sits the minister of regional development, that great exponent of the just society, who now chooses to ignore me. He does not know what I am talking about, and just chooses to ignore what I say. Surely the federal government, working in close co-operation with the government of Newfoundland, must now recognize that it has failed in this deliberate program—and I repeat “deliberate program”—to reduce the population of Bell Island to the aged, the infirm and the very young. They have failed because we still have today in this country a community with 6,500 people containing not only the aged, the infirm and the very young, but also some 2,000 able bodied people on relief who are prepared, and in fact want, to work for a living.

• (9:40 p.m.)

This great exponent of the just society, this minister who represents the working population of the province of Quebec, ignores what I say. Mr. Chairman, I realize the minister must listen to a lot of things. I know he has to listen to representations. I know the passage of his estimates must represent to him an absolute bore, as indeed parliament represents a bore to the Prime Minister. But I say to the minister that the sufferings of the people in my constituency, as in all of Canada, surely must command his attention. I hope the minister of regional development will see fit to reply to my remarks, even though he has so far seen fit to ignore them. I hope he will be able to say what the representatives of the Atlantic Development Board said before the committee, when they said that the government of Canada does not have an answer to this problem, and then I hope he will say that the government of this country is prepared to look into it with a view to using the expertise they have at their disposal and the vast resources they have at their