

Regional Unemployment

The only new energy policy in the maritime provinces is designed to help only Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. It is a new conservation program. A grant of \$500 is made to help a householder insulate his home. In addition to Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, that should be applied in Quebec, Newfoundland, New Brunswick, and in fact throughout the country. If the government does not have the fiscal capacity to start that all in one year, it can start in one part of Canada and then expand it to the rest of the country.

It is a good conservation measure to have homes properly insulated. It is a humane act of government. It would create tremendous employment in the insulating of homes and in construction work. However, for political reasons the government has only done that in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.

It is not an energy policy to help overcome regional disparities. It is a policy to help the Liberal governments in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. Soon there will not be a Liberal government in Ottawa to do that.

My time has almost expired, Mr. Speaker. I just wish to add a few words by saying—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I have already allowed a couple of minutes to the hon. member for interference. His full time has now expired.

Mr. George Baker (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, this resolution talks about unemployment and regional disparity within eastern Canada. Representing Gander-Twillingate, on the government side, I would like to talk briefly about the problem, specifically about unemployment, not in the highly political manner of the previous speaker, but objectively.

To solve any problem one must know what the problem is. So it is with government and the problem of unemployment. The problem, as I see it, is that in economically depressed areas the problem itself has never been defined.

To tackle the problem, governments have established a maze of agencies. With every new provincial budget, this or that battle is announced to combat rising unemployment, but the war never really begins. Everyone agrees that, in order to combat high unemployment, industrial development must be encouraged. In order to combat inflation you must increase production and stave off high unemployment as well.

In Newfoundland on the provincial level we have departments of government like rural development, industrial development, and development corporations like the Newfoundland and Labrador Development Corporation. On the federal level we have DREE, FBDB, loans to small business, to the fishery and to agriculture. We have government agencies too numerous to mention unless one were to write them down. All of these agencies, departments of government, government established development corporations, sit down in a board room from time to time to consider this or that application for assistance to create jobs, to increase production. The government, and rightly so, is trying to increase production.

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Government have an idea of what is wrong, they have a concept in mind, but they do not understand the problem. To understand the problem one would have to experience the problem, or have enough understanding, enough empathy, to put oneself in the shoes of those who form the majority of the unemployed in the areas defined as economically depressed.

You cannot understand the problem, Mr. Speaker, by taking a plane and flying over the area. You cannot understand the problem by taking a ride in a car through an area of high unemployment. To take a walk down the road does not help either. To speak to the unemployed will tell you something. To read their letters will tell you something. To question them will tell you more. What I am saying is that to really understand their predicament you have to investigate as closely as possible what they think, and do so this day, this month, this year.

By understanding them you discover, whether a person is skilled or not, that he or she would rather work than sit idle; that one feels better to come home after working that day. To understand that is the first step; to understand what it feels like to wonder where your next dollar will come from; to place yourself in the position of someone who cannot feed or clothe his children properly, or not be able to meet the cost of heating your home, or be troubled by bill collectors, or appear in court because you cannot pay the school tax. To understand all that is an absolute necessity. But if you do, then, and only then, are you committed, if you are in a position to do so, if it is your job to do so, to try to correct the disparity that exists, to create lasting employment, to rid that area of the depression, an economic and social depression. It would not be so if the rest of society were in the same condition. The grave injustice is that it is evident to the economically depressed that theirs is a situation of circumstance.

That brings you half way toward understanding the problem. The other half is to understand why established procedures employed by governments to encourage a solution have failed. When you understand that, you understand the problem. All of us may differ on the ultimate solutions to the problem, but to understand the problem is the first step.

In the second half of understanding the problem, one must realize that the initiatives of government have been filled with good intentions. A provincial or federal cabinet minister may feel as if he has accomplished a great deal with his department. A civil servant in that department may be just as committed to the cause. Think how distressed they must feel when they come to the realization that their efforts have been in vain. Or perhaps they never realized the truth. The established procedures have failed miserably. They have failed, perhaps, because the policy was devised by persons who do not understand the unemployed in the highly depressed areas, or who cannot comprehend why established procedures have failed.

The established procedures have failed because they have been based on incorrect assumptions. It is assumed that an extra loan at 11 per cent interest will do the trick for a failing enterprise; you assume that the economists are correct; you