

[*Translation*]

UNEMPLOYMENT—ALARMING SITUATION OF THE
UNEMPLOYED—REQUEST FOR ANNOUNCEMENT OF
GOVERNMENT POLICY

Mr. Eymard Corbin (Madawaska-Victoria): Mr. Speaker, this evening, I should like to deal once again with the problems of the unemployed in my riding of Madawaska-Victoria and northwestern New Brunswick generally. The problem I bring up also affects many other areas of Canada. Mr. Speaker, this is the second time I have brought up this matter on the motion for adjournment. The first time, neither the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Atkey) nor his parliamentary secretary deigned to grace this House with their presence and deal with the matter. Tonight, I notice their absence once again, with considerable regret and bitterness.

The first time I brought up this question on a motion for adjournment, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Postmaster General and Minister of the Environment (Mr. Reid) had been delegated to read the text prepared by the civil servants or someone else, probably the political advisers, in the office of the minister. In any event, the general tone of the answer to the questions I brought up at that time indicated that the government and its spokesmen are merely, as I have said repeatedly before, making politics on the backs of the poor seasonal workers now unemployed in northeast New Brunswick and elsewhere. The problem is very simple, Mr. Speaker. Last year, Parliament passed Bill C-14 to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act. The main purpose of that bill was to tighten up the unemployment insurance system with a view to putting a stop to the abuses from which it suffered. Members were well aware of such abuses.

● (2210)

This afternoon, I was speaking in private with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. McCrossan) and he told me that we were right in proposing this kind of amendment to the unemployment insurance scheme, and that it was not so much in the Atlantic region, in the maritimes, in the have-not provinces but in the rich, industrial regions that abuses took place. It was in those regions that there were abuses. And it is generally from there that we hear complaints about abuses to the system, not from the poorer Atlantic region.

But what puzzles me is that the minister, playing the political game, tries to blame the former government, the members on this side who voted for that legislation. What he forgets to say, however, is that it is he and his government who were elected last May 22 and who deliberately proclaimed the coming into force of sections 17 and 35, I believe, of the Unemployment Insurance Act. Originally, those sections were to come into force in June. The minister delayed the proclamation so that those sections, which specify economic regions under the act, would come into force on July 1, 1979. So I cannot understand how the minister can try to blame members

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on this side of the House for all the wrongdoing which may exist under the present application of the act, since it is he and no one else, he and his government who proclaimed the regulation and the other sections of the act. He must, therefore, assume full responsibility for it. It is about time for the minister to wake up and lend a sensitive ear to the plight of these seasonal workers.

Tonight also, Mr. Speaker—it is probably the Parliamentary Secretary to the Postmaster General and Minister of Environment who will again reply to me, as he is also the hon. member for the Niagara area—I should like to remind him that these seasonal workers who are no longer eligible for unemployment insurance benefits must leave their homes, cover sometimes a distance of over 700 miles and travel to his region in the Niagara peninsula and elsewhere in southern Ontario to help in the harvesting of vegetables, and I think it is quite unacceptable that a parliamentary secretary who is not really involved in the situation should be called upon to reply to me.

Mr. Speaker, I suggest that the Minister of Employment and Immigration is evading his responsibilities and I accuse him of not assuming the duties he agreed to carry out under his oath of office. And I regret that his parliamentary secretary who has been appointed by the minister to look into the shortcomings of the legislation and propose amendments to this act would not condescend either to come to the House to reply to an hon. member, preferring instead to send a third-rate “master-of-all-trades” to deal with something he does not know anything about. That is an insult to Parliament, an insult to the member for Madawaska-Victoria and an insult to the constituents I represent in this House. Never mind what the parliamentary secretary will tell us tonight, Mr. Speaker, I dismiss it because I feel it does not constitute at all a serious effort on the part of the government concerning the situation that prevails in my area. And if it is not the Parliamentary Secretary to the Postmaster General and Minister of Environment who answers but another one I will address to him the same remarks.

I blame the government for its lack of consistency in that situation. It is a government which does not want to govern, it is a government of students, an extremely boring government which does not have the courage, the guts and the inclination to care about the problems facing Canadians. It is a government simply interested in achieving strictly partisan objectives and which are agreeable to its political supporters. He did not show any interest in the workers of New Brunswick, the Atlantic provinces and Madawaska in particular. That is quite regrettable, Mr. Speaker.

● (2215)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I regret to interrupt the hon. member but his allotted time has expired. The hon. Parliamentary