

Supply

people of Canada per se are in a state of shock. They cannot believe that this government is standing passive while the economy literally falls around them.

The government claims to have a solution. Today the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) came before the House and told us to be patient for a few more days, because he will make a statement. As if that is going to change anything, Mr. Speaker. What we want in this country is some legislation that will result in action which will end this ever accelerating recessionary trend that we see around us.

A few weeks ago when the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) visited British Columbia, he slapped the people there in the face by saying that they did not understand what is going on in Canada. He is absolutely right, Mr. Speaker, we do not understand what is going on in Canada. We do not understand why our dollar is below 78 American cents, the lowest it has ever been. It is lower today than during the depths of the depression we had in this country. We do not understand that. We do not understand why the government allows this to occur.

We do not understand why our already stratospheric level mortgage rates are still going up. We do not understand why we have the lowest employment opportunities in a post-depression time. We do not understand why our dollar is at its lowest level ever. We do not understand why we have such an increasing volume of idle capacity built into our industrial system. We do not understand why we have record lows in housing construction or in consumer and investor confidence. He is right, Mr. Speaker; we do not understand what is happening in Canada and why the government is content to stand passively by and allow this to occur.

• (1700)

This is a dark day in Canadian history. I can say with total honesty that many people in British Columbia are facing depression conditions today. They are not looking at a recession or thinking that a depression is going to occur some time in the future; a depression is occurring in parts of British Columbia at this very moment. Of course, in any depression situation the problem is jobs. That is the bottom line. When you have this number of people unemployed in one of the richest provinces in Canada, it is nothing short of a catastrophe.

Statistics Canada tells us that 148,000 British Columbians are unemployed. That is not true. That figure does not reflect the reality. They say 148,000 people are unemployed, yet 170,857 are collecting special UIC payments, and 72,000 we consider to be part of the hidden unemployed, those people who long ago gave up hope of ever finding a job and are not actively seeking work because of the hopelessness of the situation. That gives us a real level of unemployment in British Columbia of 272,857, nearly 20 per cent of the work force. That is what happened at the beginning of the depression in British Columbia. We are staring at a depression situation with 20 per cent unemployed, not an ongoing recession.

What, Mr. Speaker, is the cost of having 272,857 people out of work? It is costing us, every hour of the day, \$226,644 in UIC payments. Then, of course, we must add on provincial welfare payments. We recognize that 150,000 people are now depending upon the human resources department for their income. Another 60,000 people are receiving GAIN payments from British Columbia. By the end of this year we will have paid out nearly \$2 billion in UIC benefits in the province of British Columbia.

But the real cost is not measured in dollars and cents. The real cost is measured in human suffering and torment, and in the disintegrating social structure on the west coast. That is the real measure of what is going on. Given enough time, courage and real decision-making, the economic problems can be solved. But the social costs reflected in family violence, wife battering, child abuse, increasing drug and alcohol abuse, juvenile delinquency, are the costs we will pay not for one year or ten years, but for a generation or more. It will take a long time to heal those scars.

When it comes to the unemployed, Mr. Speaker, the real crisis has to be in the unemployed youth of Canada. In May of 1981, 11.6 per cent of youth seeking work in British Columbia were unable to find jobs. One year later that figure had increased to nearly 20 per cent. These are young people who want to get out and build a future for themselves, their province and their country but are unable to because of the inaction, bungling and incompetence of the federal government, complemented, of course, by the provincial government.

In the last few days I had the opportunity of delivering graduation addresses to nearly 2,000 students in my riding. The most disappointing and depressing aspect of that was the fact that most of those young people had given up hope of finding a meaningful job this summer or fall. Unemployment in British Columbia is 10.8 per cent, according to official statistics, which of course are very low. On Vancouver Island it is 11.2 per cent. In the Kamloops area it is 13.5 per cent with nearly 10,000 people on lay-off and 1,200 more to come in the next handful of days. There is a two to three-month backlog of cases to be processed in UIC office there.

The human agony and suffering going on in that community, Mr. Speaker, is something to behold. No fewer than ten people on a daily basis come into my office filled with despair and a sense of hopelessness. They are coming in and asking for food; this in one of the richest provinces of one of the richest countries in the world. These people have families to feed and not enough money to buy them food. So we have set up a food hamper system; we are asking our friends and the public generally to come into the constituency office and donate food, and we will pass it along to the different churches for distribution.

That is the situation in this country and it is getting worse by the week. These are people caught between UIC and the welfare system. They do not qualify for UIC or they have been receiving benefits for over a year and are no longer eligible. They might be fortunate enough to own a humble home but they go to the human resources department and they are told if