

*The Address—Mr. Merrithew*

hardly works at all. Nowhere is there a need for co-operation more apparent than in our massive resource industries, the pillars of our economy.

I have the honour to serve as the first Cabinet Minister solely responsible for forestry since 1968. I take on this role with enthusiasm. Forestry in Canada involves not just planting and managing trees, but also logging, sawmilling, pulp and paper and other manufacturing operations which use the forest as their primary resource. As Canadians add value to their exports, it will come to represent a growing secondary manufacturing and processing sector as well.

There can be no more promising, no more challenging, no more exciting job in Ottawa today than to try to build a partnership between the two levels of government and industry to rescue this vital sector. Nor can any task be more difficult than trying to rescue this sector when the federal government's Treasury has been emptied by the previous administration. We face the problem of building an organization where there has been none for a decade, establishing new centres of talent and authority.

We must work toward increasing investment in a business community which is forced into survival strategies after four years of dismal markets. Throughout all the struggles, the greatest priority will be the re-creation of a genuine spirit of co-operation between the federal and the provincial governments.

Having served for 12 years in the provincial Government of New Brunswick, I know the frustration of trying to deal with the federal Government, which has forgotten any sense of partnership of co-operation. I can speak for my Party when I say that we are committed to a new spirit of team-work.

● (1230)

I have been a federal Minister for only two months but have already met with almost all of my provincial counterparts. I have met with labour and industry groups all over this country. In some cases, I have taken up negotiations on agreements which were begun before the change in Government, and I can tell the House that I was amazed at the petty, trivial points which had blocked agreements in the past. When I met with the Hon. Alan Pope of Ontario, we settled within half an hour the outstanding points which had blocked an agreement for well over a year.

As a maritimer, I am very conscious of the relationship between the regions of Canada and central Canada. This is a relationship which has been a key to Canada's economic development. For the first century of this nation's life, the regions supported the development of the industrial heartland, providing central Canada with the cheap raw materials and food supplies which made its growth a possibility. Today the balance has shifted. One of the chief activities of the central Government is the redistribution of wealth back to the regions in equalization and other payments. That is not to say that in our part of the country and, I suspect, in all parts of the country, we will not work hard to develop a thriving, prosperous secondary manufacturing sector.

I see the federal Government's decision to rescue the forestry sector as being a very far-sighted and progressive one. It will mean the continued economic independence and self-sufficiency of hundreds of communities in every region of this great country. By rescuing the main industrial activity of our regions, we will save billions of dollars in future support which would otherwise have to be spent to prop up these regions as they sink into economic idleness.

This is more than just pragmatic management. As Progressive Conservatives, we know that if the regions do not have indigenous employment, then Canada fails as a nation. The central concept of the confederation of provinces will be destroyed.

The forestry sector is the biggest industry in British Columbia and in my home Province of New Brunswick. It is an essential part of the economies of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Quebec, northern Ontario and the northern prairie provinces. To nurse it back to health is to offer these areas a chance to continue as viable places to live. To fail is to condemn them to ever-increasing dependence on charitable support.

The forestry sector, the largest employer in the nation, is also our biggest foreign exchange earner and one of the largest purchasers of manufactured goods in Canada. In other words, while it may take place out of the sight of cities, its impact reaches into every Canadian home.

Lately we have heard with increasing frequency that forestry is a sunset industry. This is a popular viewpoint among the elite groups in Canada. They see the traditional industries as being embarrassing, perhaps even old fashioned and doomed to extinction because of modern technology. Our Party rejects that attitude outright. We know that the resource industries are facing massive change and perhaps great hardship. However, if we abandon the fight and treat the renewable resources as sunset industries, we announce our intentions to consume the heritage that belongs to all Canadians living and as yet unborn. We will be telling our children that they will have to find something else to do with their lives and with their nation because we have used up the forests and the fish. That attitude is unpalatable to me, Mr. Speaker, and certainly it is unpalatable to the Canadian people as a whole.

Every day in Ottawa we make decisions which will determine the world our children will inherit from us. This is especially true of the Throne Speech. By making forestry a major priority, we keep a promise to the next generation that is similar to our national commitment to environmental protection, to education or to health care.

The Government has renounced that previous attitude. In the resource sectors, we have committed ourselves to rebuilding and preserving the natural gifts that we possess.

The Throne Speech made reference to encouraging domestic and foreign investment. When we make the effort to bring our forests back to the mills, we show the investment community that it can rely on Canada in the decades to come. The raw materials for growth will be there.