

*Supply*

● (1430)

[English]

**Mr. Ray Skelly (Comox-Powell River):** Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate there is no chance for one more brief question, but maybe—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker):** Order, please. I note that a number of Members have not yet been recognized during the period for questions and answers. Some Hon. Member may seek the unanimous consent of the House to extend the period of questions and answers, if he so sees fit. However, in the position of the Chair I have no alternative but to hold it to within the ten minutes, a period of time which has already, incidentally, gone past that.

**Mr. Skelly:** Mr. Speaker, in commencing debate on this subject, I might put a proposition through my speech to the Minister. That proposition is that if we put the partisan questions aside and say that the improvements which are being made in the region are certainly desirable and in the communities' benefit, there is still, in the observations which are made, one major problem and that is, with the way that the Government chooses to announce the programs. It causes confusion and no small amount of animosity on the part of constituents. To use only one example, and there are many others, what you have is a situation where the Ministry of Fisheries and Oceans—and I certainly do not want to criticize the Minister—but his Department is responsible for small craft harbours; the previous speaker's Department is responsible for implementing them; and a third Minister travels around making the actual announcements. Unfortunately, what we have is absolute chaos in the situation. No one knows what is going on and people wonder where projects come from. They seem to drop out of the blue. Those with great needs are certainly left aside to vether.

What might be a far better approach to this process is, where projects needed development, whether they were small craft harbours, highway projects, airport developments or wharf and dock transport improvements, that somewhere a priority list of these be developed and that people be given an indication of when those projects could be expected to come on stream. In that way, they would be given an opportunity to plan for those projects. Under the present circumstances we have seen quite a number of projects which seem to drop directly out of the blue, and subsequent planning in some areas has to be "hothouse" in order to get that money nailed down in that community. It has meant that we have had a less than desirable situation. Therefore, one of the things which definitely has to happen is better communication and some indication in advance of what projects are in the works and what their priority is on the list.

The debate today is on the subject, of course, of Atlantic Canada. The motion states, and I quote:

That this House recognizes the need for long-term solutions to the economic difficulties facing Atlantic Canada and, although welcoming the injection of funds provided under the Special Recovery Program, rejects the manner in which those funds are being allocated particularly the decision to use partisan advantage rather than need as the basis for the provision of funding, and

condemns the government for its failure to adopt policies which would create lasting economic growth with permanent jobs and investment in Atlantic Canada.

It is kind of ironic, Mr. Speaker, to have this resolution coming from members of the Official Opposition who are committed to having no long-term planning. I would be very interested as time goes on in this debate to hear their explanation of what appears to be a reversal of policy. Certainly, we in the New Democratic Party are extremely concerned about Atlantic Canada and the kind of abuse inflicted on that region by the present Liberal Government. And certainly the unemployment rate in Atlantic Canada is higher, and has been higher consistently in this region, than in any other region in this country.

Reflecting back on the March labour force statistics, it is worth mentioning with a bit of cynicism that it is showing an unemployment rate in the order of 15 per cent to 20 per cent in Atlantic Canada when in fact the labour force statistics have been jerry-rigged to reflect a much lower level of unemployment than that which exists. The bet would be that it is in the order of 25 per cent to 30 per cent. If we threw in an equation for underemployment, then certainly people who live in Atlantic Canada have been very badly served by this Liberal Government.

It is a bad situation and I believe you can point to the recent examples of hostility between the federal Minister of Energy and the provincial Minister of Energy in Newfoundland. That is one example of a bad situation. Certainly the kind of relationship which exists in some of those areas is not conducive to creating a positive climate in which economic development could occur. I have a feeling that we might see a worse situation with a Conservative federal Government and a Conservative provincial Government. Nevertheless, what we are faced with now would have to be described as a bad situation.

One aspect of this that is rather interesting, Mr. Speaker, is the philosophical positions which are used to approach the problems, the philosophy from which we would approach the problem of Atlantic Canada, or any other region in the country. It is ironic to watch in this House the gamesmanship which is played between the Liberal Members of the Government and the Conservative Members of the Official Opposition. They really have a philosophy which is not consistent with what is proposed in this motion. Time and time again the Conservative Members of this House have said. "Let the private sector do it. The private sector is the only one which can guide this country, shape its future, and provide economic benefits." Reflected in the Liberal budget and the comments of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde) is that the engine of economic recovery will be the private sector.

**An Hon. Member:** Right on.

**Mr. Skelly:** It is not "right on", as the Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Evans) says, for Atlantic Canada. His riding is one which is particularly blessed, with an enormous number—