

Industry, Science and Technology

Cutting back on regional development programs such as ERDAs is a travesty to the Canadians in those regions. It is also a travesty for all right-thinking Canadians because if we are to have a strong economy in the future we must have strong regions. Our economy can be only as strong as its weakest region. Our workforce can be only as strong as our weakest Canadian. Our commitment to create these opportunities must be matched, Mr. Minister, by the funding necessary to make things happen. What is happening with these agencies that have been hived off from your purview which can no longer be part of the incredible mandate which you have—

• (1200)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Order, please. I would appreciate it if the Hon. Member would address the Chair.

Mr. Peterson: I would be very pleased to address the Chair, Mr. Speaker.

During the last election, what happened in these agencies was that one-third of the \$1.5 billion allocated to the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency for a five-year period was spent in the eight months leading up to the election. How can we have an industrial strategy and policy for all of Canada when these funds are taken out of the purview of the Minister responsible for creating these types of new economic opportunities right across Canada?

For example, the Minister responsible for the Western Diversification Fund is the Minister of State for Grains and Oilseeds (Mr. Mayer). The Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency is the Minister of Public Works (Mr. MacKay). The mandate is not with the Minister opposite whose job it is to create industrial opportunities right across Canada.

When we have cut-backs coming out of their Departments which will see funding reduced from \$1.3 billion to about \$250 million according to officials from his Department, we have great cause for concern. It is another example of how pious rhetoric becomes empty in the execution.

There is going to be some sleight of hand carried on in terms of the figures that are presented to us. They are going to say that they have cut by more than 60 per cent the funding available to this Minister to do his job, but they have given it to the regions. We had a solemn commitment from the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney)

that he made on his way to the Economic Summit in Venice when he announced that the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency would be funded with "new money to the tune of \$200 million a year". We are going to count every penny to make sure that no money disappears as this shell game is being played by the Minister's office.

Let us look at the issue of industrial adjustment due to the Free Trade Agreement with the United States. Long before this deal was signed, we had warnings from the Economic Council of Canada, from the Bank of Nova Scotia and from others as to what industries in Canada were going to take a tremendous beating because of this Free Trade Agreement: textiles, footwear and clothing, household furniture, major appliances, food processing, auto parts, electrical and electronic equipment just to name a few. Industrial restructuring, worker adjustment was foreseen long before the deal was signed.

The Macdonald Commission said:

A Free Trade Agreement should incorporate explicit provisions that reflect the proportionately greater cost for adjustment that Canadians will face. Since investors, workers and managers will begin to plan their strategies for adjustment even before a final agreement is reached, it is essential that an overall adjustment assistance framework be worked out well in advance of concluding a formal treaty.

What has this Government done? Nothing. It appointed the de Grandpré Commission well after that agreement was concluded. That Commission reported only a short time ago. It emphasized a lot of the programs that have been put forward by the Official Opposition for worker assistance, for worker adjustment. This was information that the Government already had. Has the Government introduced or implemented one of those recommendations to assist in this adjustment?

On November 24, 1988, the Right Hon. Prime Minister said:

I want to tell Canadians we shall ensure innovative and generous adjustment and retraining programs will be introduced whenever and wherever required with the chief priority being the well-being of the individual Canadian worker and his family.

As yet we have seen no provisions that match the rhetoric.

In the Minister's speech, he did not mention the tragedy that is being faced by so many workers who are being thrown out of their jobs today. I could go down the list, but to date we have identified probably 4,000 to 5,000 jobs that have been lost in Canada directly attributable to the Free Trade Agreement.