

Government Orders

Lo and behold, we get this beautiful free trade agreement. I have written probably 10 letters to the Minister of Agriculture in the last four years letting him know about the difficulties of the agricultural community. We even gave him some solutions. We entered into a discussion with the state of Minnesota to open this port of entry so the agricultural community can diversify itself.

One of the things that Minnesota so desperately needs, and which we can provide, is slaughter cattle. It is a very normal commodity. What do we do now as northerners in Ontario? We ship our slaughter cattle all the way to Manitoba through North Dakota and back to Minnesota. That costs an extra \$800 per trip for transportation.

I have asked the minister on numerous occasions to examine that very simple thing we can do as members of Parliament to give that particular industry and the agricultural community a chance to make a go of it in that area. All I have got so far is political rhetoric.

Those are the kinds of issues that we are dealing with today in the House. These are the reasons why the motion put forward by my colleague is so important. We as backbenchers can stand up and talk about these kinds of issues and the government should not hold its head down in shame but listen to what we have to say. Maybe it could take a look at this initiative, put it forward, and help the community. Then this country will start to work a little more efficiently.

There are some other initiatives that we would like to talk about, and I would like to talk about, in the mining and forestry sector, but this government seems to think that it cannot get involved. If anyone believes on that side of the House that governments cannot take an active role in making our economy work then they are really stuck on an ideological bent that will not get them anywhere in the future in making this country as truly great as it should be.

I hope that during the debate—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): Order, please. The time of the hon. member has now expired.

Mrs. Dorothy Dobbie (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture)): Mr. Speaker, I want to

commend the hon. member for all of his good suggestions. They make some sense.

However, I wonder if he knows that the current federal government, which he and his colleague have spent such a lot of time denigrating, has set aside \$3.8 billion for retraining to ensure that people who are out of work through no fault of their own have an opportunity to come back into the work force and have a rewarding and productive experience in the future.

I also wonder if he is aware that we have another quarter of a billion dollars set aside for sectoral training, which will be undertaken through advisory committees in conjunction with the labour movement. The hon. member says that we have not used the resources to try to help people who are in this category and who need help. How can he say that in light of the truth and the facts that I have just laid before him?

Mr. Nault: Mr. Speaker, the numbers speak for themselves. I find it almost unbelievable that the member would stand up and say: "We have \$3.8 billion in training and we have so many dollars in sectoral training". The reality is we have four million Canadians who are not working or are on welfare.

Let us put that in clearer terms.

• (1230)

That is like saying that B.C. and Alberta, the two furthest provinces to the west, are completely unemployed, not working, or on welfare.

When we take that kind of situation and put it in its proper context tinkering around with the system is not what we are talking about. We saw in the economic statement put forward last week a continuation of the tinkering with the system that is making the situation worse. We are asking for initiatives by the government that will revamp the unemployment insurance system, that will make it a training regime rather than an income maintenance system. That is what we are talking about. For example, in my riding in the last four years there have been some major layoffs in the mining community.

We are not suggesting for a moment that in the mining community mines will not close down. For example, in Ignace 250 people were laid off permanently in the mining industry in that community because the mine was shut down.