

Supply

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Yes, I know, but we now have questions and comments.

Mr. Dingwall: Mr. Speaker, I want to compliment the Hon. Member for Egmont (Mr. Henderson) who is the only Member from Prince Edward Island representing Prince Edward Island's interests in this Parliament. Would the Hon. Member avail himself of the opportunity to explain the problem of potato inspection fees? Perhaps he could take a few minutes of our time because it is an important issue.

We have heard in this House from the Member on previous occasions that the added cost of potato inspection fees on Prince Edward Island, in view of the present economic circumstances of that industry, is devastating for Prince Edward Island's potato farmers.

While the Hon. Member is on his feet, would he indicate to the House whether this issue of potato inspection fees is a partisan issue? Or does it transcend Party politics? For instance, does the Premier of Prince Edward Island agree with the principle of potato inspection fees? Would the Hon. Member care to elaborate on those two items?

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question and remark. First, I must say that the Premier of Prince Edward Island and his Minister of Agriculture have been on record as opposing user fees or inspection fees for potatoes. Indeed, the Legislature of the Province of Prince Edward Island was unanimously opposed to such inspection fees. I cannot however say on a number of issues whether the Province of Prince Edward Island was against some of the other user fees that have been implemented by the Government over the last year or year and a half. Politicians there are the same as we are. Politicians represent people and they should be getting the message.

As far as the provincial Government of Prince Edward Island is concerned, it got a clear message in the recent by-election. People are not happy with its performance inasmuch as two Members from the Liberal Party were elected to represent them. I am not sure whether it was totally as a result of inaction by the Province of Prince Edward Island, or whether it was due to some of the penalties which the federal Government placed on the backs of Prince Edward Islanders. I suspect quite strongly—and this is certainly what the people are telling the provincial Government and me—that the federal Government in Ottawa, which happens to be of the same stripe as that provincial Government, is not listening to Prince Edward Islanders. They certainly must be getting the message.

● (1200)

Mr. Merrithew: Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to meet the challenge of those people who indicated that I would not get to my feet to speak on this particular debate. I certainly welcome the opportunity to correct some of the impressions which have been left in the House. I listened to the sweeping—

Mr. Dingwall: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Order, please. The Hon. Minister knows that this is the period for questions and comments. There are still five minutes or six minutes remaining for questions or comments on the Hon. Member's speech. I hope he is not entering into debate at this time.

Mr. Merrithew: No, Mr. Speaker. I am rising to make some comments. I have listened to the sweeping generalizations and the condemnations. One might ask the question: Where were they when their Party was in power in the House? I was on the receiving end of the rancour, hatred and antagonism shown by the previous Government toward all provinces in Canada. I sat through many meetings and I watched the way in which that Government treated the provincial Governments.

Yesterday, I had the privilege of signing, on behalf of the Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion (Mr. Stevens), a \$30 million industrial development agreement. In case those Liberal Members do not think that this is very much, the daily newspaper today in New Brunswick indicated that it was \$30 million for the New Brunswick industry.

I happened to be the Minister of Commerce and Development when the previous agreement ran out—not last year, not the year before, nor the year before that, but in 1980. As hard as we tried to get the previous Government to sign a new agreement, it refused to do so.

Mr. Mayer: Shame on them.

Mr. Merrithew: The Hon. Member for Egmont (Mr. Henderson) indicated that he was in favour of small business. We in New Brunswick know what small business is all about. We developed the best small industry financial assistance program in Canada. In 1980, the previous Government let it lapse and said: "If you don't like it, lump it". The poor Province of New Brunswick had to pick up the cost of that industrial development program.

Hon. Members have referred to unemployment this morning. Between 1980 and 1984, there was not one net job increase in Atlantic Canada, certainly not in the Province of New Brunswick. At least, in the past year, we have created 14,000 new jobs in the Province of New Brunswick.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Merrithew: Perhaps the Hon. Member should have it drawn to his attention, as was mentioned by the Hon. Member for Northumberland-Miramichi (Mr. Jardine), that Saint John had one of the highest rate of new housing starts in Canada this year.

I do not know how the Liberal Party, that opposition Party, can have the audacity and gall to talk about forestry when it has not had the decency to ask even one question of the Minister of State for Forestry in the House in the past 15 months. When we assumed power 15 months ago, the previous Government had in place about a quarter of a billion dollars in forestry agreements. We now have \$1,057 million worth of agreements with the provinces.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!