

selecting the bases in their area for closure. They want to see the studies which ostensibly justify the closure, so that they can assess the accuracy of the information which such reports contain. These people are fighting against a potential economic disaster and they have been denied access to information which could make their fight effective, information which was accumulated—I emphasize this—at public expense.

To the best of my knowledge, there are three reports extant dealing with the subject of Canadian forces base closures. Two of them have been produced by the Department of National Defence and one by the Department of Regional Economic Expansion. Not one of these reports has been made public. This leads one to ask, why not? It also leads one to suspect that the government's decision was brought down on the basis of considerations other than those contained in the reports.

I am not saying that there is of necessity anything wrong with the government's rejecting the advice of its public servants. What I am saying is that when the government makes a decision, the public has the right to know upon what facts it based its decision. The public also has the right to sufficient information, to be able to judge the wisdom of that decision. In short, such reports should be made public and if the government's decision can be questioned on the basis of information in the reports, then the government should be expected to explain its position.

This country is troubled, as are most other countries in the world, by a growing mistrust on the part of the populace of the institutions of government. It is troubled by an increasing reliance, by the young especially, upon extra-institutional means of expressing opinions and seeking changes in policy direction. I speak of demonstrations violent and otherwise. I submit, Mr. Speaker, that one of the major contributing factors to this unrest, to the attitude of the public that the government stands apart from it, that it is not a means through which the community acts collectively in its own interest but is, instead, an opponent, a vague "they" which imposes decisions upon the public, is due to the hoary old tradition of keeping internal reports secret and not trusting the public with the information they contain.

● (10:00 p.m.)

This government has talked about participatory democracy. Meaningful and effective participation by the public in the governmental process must be predicated upon the public having adequate access to key information. Why not make such reports public as a first step in this direction? The Minister of Regional Economic Expansion has often indicated a lack of respect for sacred cows. This is one that could be abandoned, with immensely beneficial effects upon Canadian society. I call upon the minister to begin breaking the tradition of secrecy by making public, the report of his department dealing with regional economic effects of Canadian forces base closures.

23568—32

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

Mr. Martin P. O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Mr. Speaker, I apologize to the hon. member for Selkirk (Mr. Rowland) for not being in the House when he began his remarks. Perhaps the adjournment proceedings began a little before ten o'clock and I was a few moments late.

I share with the hon. member the strong interest in having maximum information available, not only to the members of this House but to all Canadians, particularly those affected by economic circumstances which bring very painful effects to their communities and those who find themselves struggling to arrive at solutions. The Department of Regional Economic Expansion participates very actively and keenly in the multidisciplinary teams that are formed to examine the adverse social and economic consequences of base closures. Such was the case with the two bases being closed in Manitoba. We are concerned and interested in doing everything we can within our departmental jurisdiction to mitigate the difficulties. Everything possible is being done under the incentives program to attract new industries to supplant the economic activity that is lost through the closing of bases.

The hon. member referred to some formal studies. I have been informed that no formal studies such as the type referred to at page 553 of *Hansard* exist in the department. There are necessarily studies of a nature in which officials are involved from the point of view of the department examining how its responsibilities can be brought to bear upon the dilemmas faced by these communities. As far as I am aware, there is no formal study of the nature suggested by the hon. member.

I know the hon. member attended, with a delegation from Manitoba, upon the minister and senior departmental officials to put the case of these communities before the government. This was very useful. The department is actively involved and concerned with finding solutions. It is a very beneficial process. We are doing everything we can to attract enterprise.

Fortunately, the two bases referred to by the hon. member are in the designated region of Manitoba. There have been from organizations some very interesting proposals on how to develop Rivers, in particular. One such organization is the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood, with which I am sure the hon. member is familiar.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order, please.

FINANCE—SIZE OF INCREASE IN GROSS NATIONAL
PRODUCT—TAX RELIEF MEASURES TO
STIMULATE ECONOMY

Mr. Robert McCleave (Halifax-East Hants): Mr. Speaker, I think I am supposed to talk about the budget of next Thursday night and somewhat lift the veil of secrecy that has surrounded it until now. On the other hand, I think if I were Minister of Finance, one of the more difficult positions to fill in the House, I would approach the budget on Thursday night from several standpoints. First, I think I would approach it from the standpoint of