

the debate ended, there is another item regarding Atlantic Canada about which I should like to speak. It is one of the reasons I went to the First Ministers' Conference and that is the Government's announcement in the Budget that it would be reducing expenditures for transfer payments by \$2 billion annually. Transfer payments provide the money that goes to post-secondary education and medicare.

● (1800)

It does not matter to me that the Government is pretending that this is not a cut. I know that when they were in Opposition, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) were two of the chief critics of the Liberal Government when it did the same thing. Those two Ministers sat right here on the front benches and called the MacEachen Budget a cut that was breaking faith with the provinces. That is what they said then. Each of those Ministers said something to the effect that that would result in the closing of schools and the loss of beds for hospitals. I find it quite interesting that the Ministers who are actually responsible for health care and for providing money for medicare and post-secondary education are saying exactly the opposite now that they sit on the Government benches.

It is apparent, particularly in the area of medicare, that because of our growing population and because of the growing technology in the health field there are going to be cost increases in the field of health care, cost increases which will be much higher than the increase in the cost of living. For the Prime Minister to address the premiers and the House of Commons by saying that the Government will cover the cost of living and therefore the provinces should be grateful is for him to try to sell a myth. In fact, we know that the cost to the provinces for medicare and post-secondary education will increase by more than the cost of living.

For the Minister of Finance to say: "It's all right, boys and girls, it doesn't matter because we are going to cover at least the cost of living," ignores the fact that he is transferring the burden from the federal tax base to that of the provinces. The provinces will have to make up that shortfall. There is no region in Canada that will suffer more from that than Atlantic Canada. That is something with which the Government will have to come to grips. The Government broke a promise to the people of Atlantic Canada and that is something which will be remembered.

I recognize that there is not much time left in this debate and I will sit down soon, but in closing, I do want to say that the Government broke faith in so many areas that there really does now exist the cynicism about which the Liberal Member who spoke previously spoke so eloquently. However, Liberal Members must share much of the blame for that. They have to share that blame with the Conservative Members. What the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Health and Welfare and saying is exactly the opposite of what they said when they were in Opposition and that breeds cynicism. It certainly breeds cynicism in the area of this country which needs the most assistance in order to develop in its own way.

Supply

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): Questions or comments? Resuming debate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fernand Robichaud (Westmorland-Kent): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by thanking my hon. friend from Churchill (Mr. Murphy) for leaving me some of his time, and I would like to take advantage of the few minutes I have left to take stock of the situation. I would have liked to do so in greater detail, but I will do what I can in the circumstances. Mr. Speaker, if I were to paint a picture of everything the Conservative Government should do for Atlantic Canada, I think it would not be a very happy one, with very few bright spots.

Not a day goes by in Atlantic Canada without people asking me, when I am there: Why are we being ignored? Why have people forgotten we exist? Mr. Speaker, it is not just me—it is also what the people down there think. Not long ago, according to the results of a public opinion poll, the popularity rating of the Conservatives in this region dropped to 33 per cent. The Liberals went up to 43 per cent. And no wonder. It is because this Government has done nothing except implement negative development policies in our region. Especially if we consider the question of regional economic development and what has been done for the Atlantic provinces. The Budget was cut by \$450 million. In the Atlantic provinces, the conclusion is that the Government is ignoring us and has forgotten that we exist. Mr. Speaker, the Government wants to let the market forces act, and we all know what happens when you do that. The large urban centres are the winners, and disadvantaged regions like ours are the losers.

Mr. Speaker, this Government has no regional development policy for the very simple reason that to have such a policy, one must first have the political will to help these regions. And that is exactly what this Government lacks.

Another example to explain why people in Atlantic Canada have lost confidence in the Government, is what is going to happen to transfer payments. We are told that these payments will not be reduced. No indeed! They will not be reduced, but just the same, it is going to cost New Brunswick about \$120 million. And they say: Don't worry, it's peanuts.

I continue, Mr. Speaker. I am talking about fisheries which happen to be a labour-intensive sector in Atlantic Canada, yet the only thing they managed to do was to cut the budget for small craft harbours, and then they decided to ask the fishermen to pay for certain projects such as dredging and wharf repairs. It is totally ludicrous to expect low income fishermen to finance projects which are the responsibility of the Government. Even more so when we consider the program to help fishermen build their own boats—there is no money left!

Our fishing fleet will gradually become obsolete and there will be no money to replace it.