

*Supply*

Government should have an input into the decision-making process.

● (1650)

The Canadian people are fortunate indeed to have had the Hon. Member for Central Nova (Mr. Mulroney), the Leader of our Party, make a deliberate decision, in co-operation with the Hon. Elmer MacKay, to represent a constituency in Nova Scotia. The Hon. Member for Central Nova had a long, useful and positive relationship with Atlantic Canada as a youth in university and as a prominent member of the Canadian business community. The fact that he represents a constituency in Atlantic Canada has given him the opportunity to have a deeper and better understanding of many of the problems that Members from Atlantic Canada have been fighting. We require special recognition of the disparities that exist between Atlantic Canada and the remainder of this nation.

When he becomes Prime Minister after the next general election, he will have a sensitivity to the problems we grapple with on a daily basis. He will look forward to positive suggestions. He will initiate new programs that will be of real and lasting benefit. This will go a long way toward eliminating the regional economic disparity that now exists.

As a veteran member of this institution, I can say that there have been times when special legislative initiatives were taken geared specifically to overcoming the disparities in Atlantic Canada. They were designed to assist in the industrial sector and every other sector in order to alleviate some of the difficulties faced by people from an employment and social justice point of view. Unfortunately, for the last decade, we have seen very little of a positive nature with regard to overcoming the disparities that we face.

It is obvious that the gap between Atlantic Canada and the rest of Canada is widening. We again face an out-migration of our people. For a period of time there was a turnaround when people were returning. There were jobs for them. They had an opportunity to participate in the area from which they came.

In the days ahead, dramatic initiatives must be taken that will say to the total business community, inside and outside Canada, that the Government is going to put in place special programs and policies that will give them the opportunity to realize their specific goals. At the same time, this will provide new jobs in place of the LIP, "gyp" or whatever the programs are called. They do nothing more than guarantee that for 10 or 12 weeks people will be employed. However, forever and a day these people will be recipients of unemployment insurance. They have no hope of realizing their potential or the destiny they desire and have a right to expect. That is not happening.

I want to mention a few matters that could be of real value. This could be done almost immediately. It would produce a new atmosphere and new hope for the unemployed in our area who are becoming chronically unemployed. They see no hope for today, tomorrow or next year.

One initiative that could be taken by the federal Government could be through co-operation with our chartered banks rather than any legislative initiative. This initiative must come

from the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde). The chartered banks would not pay that much attention to individual Members of Parliament. This Parliament, through the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance, should ask the chartered banks to develop a sector that places special emphasis on Atlantic Canada. It should guarantee an examination of every proposal put forward by every enterpriser. New ideas could be fostered to produce new industries. I am not talking about megaprojects which employ 2,000 or 3,000. I am talking about small businesses which employ 10 or 15 people. Small business must continue to be the backbone of this nation, especially in Atlantic Canada.

The past two years have been times of great difficulty. Whether we want to admit it or not, these problems exist at this moment in Atlantic Canada. Atlantic Canada is not coming out of the recession. There is as much unemployment as ever, and not many new initiatives are being taken. Interest rates are again climbing. Whatever possibilities might have been in the minds of individual investors are gone. What might have happened is being flattened out because of high interest rates. Rather than trying to assist, the banks immediately call in their loans. This creates more and more bankruptcies of normally viable small business ventures. In 1981, 1982 and 1983, there was a tremendous increase in bankruptcies in Atlantic Canada. The chartered banks failed their customers by not riding with them through a very difficult high-interest period. With proper procedures, the Government could convince the chartered banks that they have a special responsibility, just like the Government, to assist in eliminating regional economic disparity.

My second suggestion is that there be an examination of our transportation policy, specifically with regard to Atlantic Canada. In the last two decades, if not three, there has not been an in-depth examination of the transportation policy in Atlantic Canada. One might say, Mr. Speaker, that we have always been like the tail wagging the dog. We receive whatever an examination of transportation brings forward that relates to the remainder of Canada but never to our own specific region of Canada. Last year, for instance, when we were supposedly coming out of the recession, the Minister of Transport, for reasons best known to him, decided that he would undertake an examination of the assistance that was available to industries in our part of Canada to see whether or not he could eliminate or reduce the transportation assistance that was available.

● (1700)

That examination guaranteed that nothing happened in Atlantic Canada for all of last year when the rest of the country was coming out of the recession. The industrial, agricultural, fishing and lumbering sectors did not know whether there would be any assistance and if so how much, so no one could make any long-term decisions. They were simply put on hold through all of last year when the rest of the nation was at least experiencing some movement in a positive direction.