

Industry, Science and Technology

Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick, create more hospital bed closures and a deterioration in the residents of Atlantic Canada's ability to have access to quality health care.

Then we saw the big shell game with the Government and the Minister responsible for ACOA. I referred to it earlier, the \$1.05-billion five-year program of new money. We have seen what has happened with that under the Budget.

• (1700)

The Budget came down and the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) made much ado about nothing, as did the Minister responsible for ACOA. They talked about how they had increased the commitment. By the time the opposition Parties and the media went through the forest built around the actual figures in those Estimates, it was only last week when we found out that ACOA's five-year program was going to be stretched out to seven years. One does not have to be a math scholar to know that that will amount to a 20 per cent to 25 per cent cut yearly if those funds are spread over a seven-year program instead of a five-year program. That is another wallop and kick in the tush for Atlantic Canada.

I have attempted five times to get the Minister and the Government to talk about the ERDA process, the Economic and Regional Development Agreements. On March 31 there were \$721 million in agreements expired in Atlantic Canada. We asked the Government for a commitment that it would go ahead with the ERDA process. All provinces in Atlantic Canada depend on those programs. It is not the icing on the cake, it is the flour that goes into baking the cake in Atlantic Canada.

Yet the Minister responsible for ACOA at committee last week, and in the House since then, has absolutely refused to strip down the woods and the forest that he has built around the real figures for ACOA and for ERDA and tell us what the true picture is. The people of Atlantic Canada know, and the people of Canada now know that the Government is not committed to regional development. The Government is committed to dismantling regional development programs over the next three to five years.

We have seen base closures, and we have seen reports that the coal industry in Cape Breton Island is on the chopping block. Langan Mine, outside my home town, may be cut by the Government's callous and uncaring attitude toward development in Atlantic Canada.

The Bill proves the point that I and many others have been attempting to make. In effect, the Bill does away with any legislative responsibility for regional development in Atlantic Canada. As such, I will join with my colleagues in stating that it falls short in its intent for a new Department of Industry, Science and Technology, but it shows the true Tory agenda to withdraw from regional development programs, especially in Atlantic Canada, and to cut us adrift.

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Madam Speaker, I am happy to have the opportunity this afternoon to say a few words on the Bill before the House and the amendment thereto. I represent a riding in northern Ontario and the establishment of this Department, or its change of name, and the changes the Government is imposing, are of great importance to us.

During the past four years we have seen a deterioration in the programs for regional economic expansion in northern Ontario. The Government has only taken one initiative, of which I am aware, and that was to establish the FEDNOR program. It is a small program of some \$8 million a year for a five-year period which will provide incentives to small industries to expand and develop. Generally, that program, at least in some rural communities and rural areas, has been reasonably successful, even though it took approximately two years to get it operational.

We are not only concerned about the small programs such as FEDNOR which have some benefit, particularly in rural communities, but the over-all plan and scope of activities which will make industry function and allow it to modernize, upgrade, develop, and of course the whole scope of Government activity as it affects the slow-growth areas.

I only have to mention the decision by the Government in December, 1986, to impose an export tax on softwood lumber, and one sees the problems of regional development which permeate all Government decisions. When a Government takes a unilateral decision to impose an export tax, it throws large portions of that industry into decline and into a tailspin. Certainly, we have been reaping the whirlwind of that during the past