

Adjournment Debate

Mr. Corbett: Mr. Speaker, I trust the time just taken will be added to the end of my comments.

● (1810)

I expressed some concern on January 26 over the difficulties that shipyard workers, particularly in the new ship construction sector, are experiencing in the country. I asked the Minister responsible for industry, trade and commerce if perhaps there might be something which could be done about the serious plight that this country's jobless shipyard workers are currently facing. Quite obviously from his response I took it, as did the many thousands of unemployed shipyard workers in the country, that there was a definite lack of expressed interest on his part and that indeed they were not going to be looked upon favourably in the immediate future.

This runs extremely contrary to the suggestions which have been put forth in the past by the Hon. Minister responsible for shipbuilding policy in the country. He has been indicating to me for a good number of months that indeed the Government was extremely concerned about the plight of shipyards in the country and the fact that they have been plagued with a substantial amount of unemployment.

As you are no doubt aware, Mr. Speaker, a program was announced called the Special Recovery Capital Projects Program. Some \$630 million was allocated to this program, but unfortunately the Government has not seen fit to put, in real terms, any amount of those dollars which is being translated in a meaningful way into jobs for these shipyard workers in the new ship construction sector.

For instance, let me relate to the House some of the programs which have been implemented, none of which, I am surprised to hear, have funnelled into the Saint John shipyard, which the Government heralded with a great amount of fanfare would be a major recipient of the frigate program. We hope that will come onstream next fall, by the end of next October, although no definite word has yet come down from Ottawa. As I understand it, this is still the intention.

Because this yard in Saint John is now all but virtually shut down as a result of the lack of work there are hundreds of shipyard workers unemployed in that region who would normally be expected to be employed in the frigate program when it comes onstream. Their concern is that if something does not take place between now and next fall when the program is due to come onstream a great many of these skilled workers will have left the work force and gone to either other construction sectors in Canada, or perhaps left the country altogether. What we will have as a result is an influx of foreign workers who will be taking jobs from those who would normally be slated to do the work this frigate program was intending to cover.

Let me say that of the \$630 million originally allocated to Transport Canada for new ship construction, there has only been \$376 million allocated to date. That has mainly gone to Quebec. A small amount has gone to Halifax, a substantial amount has gone to B.C., a smaller amount to Ontario—a

small project was allocated to Pictou—and some was allocated for the construction of barges, apparently in Thunder Bay.

There is still a substantial amount of that money which has not been allocated, but has been earmarked for projects such as the type 1200 heavy icebreaker, the type 800 small navaid tenders, two icebreaker refits, as well as an unspecified number of other small shore-based craft.

I recommend to the Government that it seriously consider allocating some of this money, and I am not asking that all of it, by any stretch, be to Saint John. I hope the Parliamentary Secretary does not stand in his place today and tell us what marvellous treatment the Saint John yard has been given by virtue of the frigate award announced here some time last year by the Minister, because in actual fact the majority or the lion's share of the work under that program is going to Quebec yards.

Although I know that the workers of Saint John, and certainly myself, applaud the Government for accepting the best tender and awarding that contract to certainly one of the most competent shipbuilding shipyards in the world, recognizing the expertise of the workers affiliated with that yard, nonetheless the fact is that the majority of the work that is going to be generated by that program will be going to yards in Quebec. I would ask him to take that under consideration.

● (1815)

My final point is this. I would ask the Government to address the very serious loophole that exists in the program which results in ships that would have otherwise been built in Canadian yards, providing employment for thousands of Canadians, now being built offshore. This Government is undertaking the subsidization of ships being constructed in foreign yards. It is effectively putting thousands of our shipyard workers out of work. That is very disconcerting. I would ask the Parliamentary Secretary to take into direct consideration those two concerns that are being expressed by the workers of this country.

Mr. Douglas Fisher (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I commend the Hon. Member for representing his riding here so enthusiastically. I can assure the House that the Government is deeply concerned about the employment situation in the shipbuilding industry, particularly on the East Coast. It is unfortunate, however, that the Hon. Member does not seem to have been paying attention to the numerous initiatives taken by the Government in the last couple of years to alleviate the plight of shipyard workers. Indeed, if it were not for the Government's positive reaction to the world-wide recession in shipbuilding, there would likely not be anything built in this country's shipyards over the next few years. Just to refresh the Hon. Member's memory, I will go briefly over some of these initiatives.

In April, the Government introduced the Special Recovery Capital Projects Program under which it announced its intention to proceed with a \$700 million Coast Guard vessel