

Western Diversification Office and the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. But the Prime Minister has a lot of other responsibilities and he will get to the point where he cannot keep all of them going on the boil at the same time. Most people cannot keep more than four or five things going at one time and with the present Prime Minister, it is a lot more than that.

Under those circumstances, to fail to have a ministry which has over-all oversight over the question of regional fairness between eastern Canada, western Canada and the less favoured regions of central Canada is, I suspect, a profound mistake and something for which western Canadians will find themselves paying when this legislation is put into place.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate.

Mr. Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, has the time ran out for questions and answers for the Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Cassidy)? I have a question I would like to ask him if it is at all possible.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The period for questions and comments has expired. We are resuming debate with the Hon. Member for Regina East (Mr. de Jong).

● (1150)

Mr. Simon de Jong (Regina East): Mr. Speaker, I wish to participate in the debate on the western diversification legislation which is presently at third reading stage in the House. Those of us who come from western Canada are all concerned with the economic and social developments of our regions. In the last number of years there have been major economic crises which have faced the people of western Canada.

The first and foremost is with respect to the dramatic decline in the prices paid for farm produce, in particular grains, which has led to the bankruptcy of a large number of family farms. It has resulted in a decline of farm value, land value, which threatens in turn many banking institutions such as credit unions. They have loans out on lands which are now not worth the value that they were when they were bought.

As well, in the last number of years we have seen a decline in the price and demand for many of the natural resources that come out of western Canada, in particular the prairie provinces, a decline in both the price and the volume of potash, oil and gas. In turn, that has had an effect throughout the economy of western Canada.

What we find in my home province of Saskatchewan is a declining population, unacceptably high unemployment in many regions of the province and a general sense of despair. There is not a tremendous sense of future and hope, which is odd, coming out of Saskatchewan since one thing that we have always had is a sense of hope. We call ourselves "next year country" because there was always a sense that next year was going to be better.

Western Economic Diversification Act

As I travel throughout my riding, which is in part urban and in part rural, I find a tremendous sense of pessimism and not much hope that next year will be better. It is necessary to develop some strong economic and social strategy to help diversify the economies of the West, in particular the prairie provinces, so that when we see the ups and downs in the prices of our natural products, our grains and our natural resources that they do not carry the whole economy of the West with them. I think it has always been a dream of various federal and provincial Governments, whether they have been Liberal, New Democratic or Conservative, to attempt to develop some alternate strategy so that the economic base in the West can be diversified and as such strengthened in order to withstand the ups and downs of the markets.

I must say that there was a certain amount of hope in the West when in 1984 a Conservative federal Government was elected. For a long time many people in the West felt that the Liberal Government of Mr. Trudeau had ignored the West. His Government did not receive too many seats from western Canada. Its political base was essentially in Québec and Ontario. It was felt that the economic policies of the Liberal Government reflected its economic base.

There was certainly a tremendous sense of being ignored by western Canadians. Thus, in 1984, many people who voted for the Conservative Party in the West, even though many of them might not have been Conservative, felt that a change in government was needed in order to rebalance the sharing of economic wealth and development between East and West. They saw central Canada being economically healthy whereas western Canada was on an economic decline and being ignored.

I must say that a great many of the folks who voted for the Conservative Party in western Canada are bitterly disappointed. There are the obvious examples of the fighter contract being let to Montreal rather than to Winnipeg, which is a major irritant to western Canadians. We also find that the election of the Conservative Party in 1984 really did not change things very much in western Canada. We recognize that in its Budget of 1985 the Government slashed some \$3 billion out of regional economic development, a decrease in the budget of regional and economic development that continued from one Budget to the next. It is estimated that some \$9 billion in money could and should have gone to regional economic development. But that was slashed from the Budget—slashed by some \$3 billion in three years.

You will recognize as well, Mr. Speaker, despite the record of the Conservative Party to get more procurement in the West, that when you look at the figures from 1984-85 to the present you will see that during those Conservative years there was a steady decline of purchases by the national Government in the West. In 1984-85 the figure was 13.9 per cent of federal expenditures going to purchases from western Canada. In 1985-86 that figure declined to 12.8 per cent. In 1986-87 it further declined to 11.5 per cent. Thus even in the area of procurement, western Canadians have seen their share of