

*Municipal Taxes*

They were not provided with a house for a house, so it was just beyond their economic capacity to accept.

In brief, the closing of that radar base was done in a manner which, I would suggest, was not at all an example of good corporate citizenship. It was a public sector enterprise. No one argues about the fact that technology had overtaken the radar base and closure had to come, but the manner in which it took place should have set a good example for private companies which, due to various circumstances and conditions, must sometimes close their operations. The Department of National Defence was sympathetic. The member of Parliament had a good hearing with senior officials in the Department of Defence, with the minister, and with the parliamentary secretary who now sits near me. I refer to the hon. member who moved this motion. The Department of National Defence was primarily concerned about its own costs and its own personnel as well as the civilians who were being affected. There was not much they could do, however, because what had to be done was beyond their authority and competence. The Department of Regional Economic Expansion was also involved in a very serious way, and was prepared to assist if a clear-cut proposal with accurate cost estimates was put forward. This did not happen. The department endeavoured to do what it could but, in the end, there was no action they could take.

Ontario Hydro, another agency of government, was willing to consider putting in a power line to replace the diesel power produced by the radar base that had provided electricity for the citizens. They could not do it on their own, however. They needed the pulp companies to throw in some money. They needed the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to add something and, as well, they needed something from the CNR which was producing power of its own. There were varying degrees of interest, but none of the parties offered the money that was required.

The Crown Assets Disposal Corporation became involved in a rather interesting way. There was a snow plough and a fire truck that this little unorganized community needed, and which DND was prepared to transfer to Crown Assets, so that they somehow could come into the possession of the community. Crown Assets presented a formula which provided that the community could have these two pieces of equipment if it was prepared to pay market value for them. That sounded logical. My bookkeeping friend over there would ask, what is wrong with that? What was wrong with it was that the community of Armstrong was an unorganized municipality. It had no tax base, no revenue. It could not manufacture the money out of thin air. On their behalf I put a counter-offer forward. I thought we could raise at least 10 per cent of the market value if Crown Assets was prepared to accept that. They finally did.

Meanwhile, however, the Department of National Defence had second thoughts. They felt they could use this beat up, secondhand, worn out equipment somewhere else, and sent in a couple of military personnel to pick it up. In the middle of a busy afternoon, I received a phone call advising me that two military personnel had come to take away the snow plow and

[Mr. Penner.]

the fire truck. I was asked what I could do about it. There was only one thing that could be done, Mr. Speaker. There was only one road into the town, and with the co-operation of the Ontario Provincial Police a roadblock was set up. The equipment was not allowed to leave until I had the opportunity of speaking to a general or two. They said there had been some kind of misunderstanding, some sort of error, and that the equipment was to remain there. The Ontario Provincial Police took down the roadblock and then provided a police escort to the military personnel so that they could get out of town safely. These are some of the absurd situations and problems that were caused by this kind of a poorly thought out closure of a radar base.

There are many other problems I could cite in this case study, but let me tell the House about the response of an hon. Tory minister in the provincial government. He said that we should not be bothered with all of these problems related to unorganized communities. What we should do is bite the bullet, and let these communities die. Mind you, he did not go to a public meeting in Armstrong and make that statement. He made it in the safety of Queens Park in Toronto. To the best of my knowledge he has never gone to that community.

● (1750)

These small unorganized communities, as the hon. member for Timiskaming knows, do not die. They often have serious economic set backs. They go through a crisis when some job-creating industry or other public or private enterprise leaves, but they do not die. They just linger on and suffer, and the people are a little poorer and worse off for it. But one cannot, by any kind of government action, cause the death of these communities.

What do these communities need? They need a plan for future development. They need someone in these times of crises to help them out. Many government departments, agencies, and even the private sector should get involved. For example, a representative on behalf of one private company said, "We think we can help this community get over this difficulty that it is facing." But when a wood cutting operation was started up it was found that adequate accommodations were not available for the workers. It was not possible to attract new skilled labour into the town because facilities were few, if they existed at all.

My hon. friend has proposed that there be a modest program of assistance for these kinds of communities to help them over difficult times. We are not talking about some large, new social program added to our present structure. Of course not. We are all aware of deficits, and we are concerned about them at the various levels of government. But certain expenditures can be justified if there is a real human problem and social need in play, or if it has something to do with nation building or maintaining.

I suggest in addition to what my hon. friend has proposed to this House that there ought to be a co-ordinating committee of government and private enterprise to help communities in crisis overcome these difficulties. Many agencies of govern-