

Industry, Science and Technology

saying that regional development programs were at risk if this Government were to be re-elected.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) himself said that he was committed to maintaining regional development programs in every guise. Indeed in 1987 he created a great deal of fanfare by a public proclamation of a new program called the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. This was announced in St. John's, Newfoundland when, I believe, he was on a junket over to Europe. I do not have the exact quote, but I think I am close enough when I say that he said this is \$1.05 billion in new money in a new direction. This is not old money. This is not recycled money. It is new money. He said it again and again during the federal campaign in the fall of last year. He also said a lot of other things concerning regional development. His Deputy Prime Minister prior to the campaign said that things like VIA Rail, the national infrastructure of a rail transportation system from one coast to the other, would be expanded so that everyone across this country could benefit by an efficient and renewed rail transportation system.

After the election was over what we saw was nothing short of startling. Even in my wildest dreams as an opposition Member on the campaign trail, I could not have seen that this Government's agenda for regional development could be as sinister. I could not have imagined that what the Government would do after it was elected to another term was to systematically cut the Atlantic provinces adrift. It is unbelievable that any government that sits in this Parliament could be as callous as it has proven to be in the last number of weeks and months.

The first thing it has done, if we talk about regional development, is completely abandon its position as the protector of that great national resource that we have on the East Coast called the fishery. Over two years ago the fishermen and people in the industry begged this Government, the Minister at the time and the current Minister to have a look at the fishery because they said the Atlantic fisheries were in crisis. This Minister and this Government ignored their pleas. We saw just prior to the election last year that this Government actually increased quotas for northern cod at a time when there was some conflicting information available from its very own officials that said that the cod stocks may be in peril.

After the election, we saw what the real agenda was. It has mismanaged the fisheries.

Just a few weeks ago, we had an announcement by National Sea Products that there would be over 5,000 individuals affected by lay-offs and by plant closures in Atlantic Canada. There are 30,000 individuals in Nova Scotia alone who depend on the fisheries directly or indirectly for a livelihood. This is not some small mom and pop shop on the corner that, if it closes, people will go somewhere else and get another job in a retail outlet or another mom and pop shop. This is a major national industry, not just in Nova Scotia and not just in Atlantic Canada. But the Government sat back until the fisheries were in a state of complete collapse. Strike one on Atlantic Canada.

Then the Minister of Employment came in with sweeping changes to the Unemployment Insurance Act which have had a very disastrous effect on some of the regions of Canada, some places in Nova Scotia. What it did was increase the number of weeks that individuals would have to work before they could qualify, decrease the amount of benefits payable and at the same time decrease the benefit payment period. That has had a net negative effect on Atlantic Canada. This winter there will be hundreds of individuals, perhaps thousands, that because of these regressive changes, these uncaring changes, will be forced onto welfare in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland. But to date all our pleas have fallen on deaf ears.

Then we had the infamous Budget that came through, the Budget that was going to set everything straight. In the minds of Atlantic Canadians it set a lot of things straight. We have seen cuts to established program funding in Atlantic Canada. It hits there harder than in Ontario and Quebec than in most provinces. In Nova Scotia, a cut of \$16 million to \$18 million in established program funding, moneys that are used to fund our medical system and our post-secondary education system. Our post-secondary educational institutions were already in crisis in Nova Scotia. This is a crippling blow. Hospitals in Nova Scotia, because the provincial treasury did not have the revenue, had to shut down entire wings. But we have a national medicare system. We are supposed to have equal access to medical care of a high national calibre no matter where we live. But \$15 million of that \$17 million or \$18 million that has been cut out of the transfers for health care has occurred in Nova Scotia. That is going to affect many poor areas of Nova Scotia,