

Supply

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): The hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve has only a few minutes left. He should keep his answer short.

Mr. Ménard: Mr. Speaker, in school I was always told I had an exceptional talent to sum things up. My colleague is quite right when he says we should remind the government that three main steps should be taken.

Mr. Speaker, is the hon. member across the way trying to interfere systematically so I have less time to give my answer? So, there are three main steps.

First of all, the government should make tools available to businesses which, in many cases, have specific conversion plans in mind.

Mr. Speaker, I do not understand what the minister is saying.

• (1050)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I regret to interrupt the member, but the period reserved for questions and comments is now over. The Hon. Minister of Industry has the floor on debate.

[*English*]

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry): Mr. Speaker, when the hon. member suggests that we make tools available to these companies, what he really means is a cheque book. That perhaps is where I should begin.

I would like to make a few general remarks about what the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve has said this morning. I do welcome this debate. It is an opportunity for us to talk about an important aspect of industrial policy, that being defence conversion, but I want to put it in the broader context.

I have a few comments though arising from the hon. member's remarks. First of all, let me say how pleased I am that the Bloc Quebecois members are interested in talking about defence conversion. Realizing that their political objective is to create a new country, one which would have no army, navy or air force, one would have expected they would be anticipating massive expenditures on defence itself. If they succeed in their objective they may as well anticipate that. Therefore defence conversion is not what they should be concerned about, but in fact the creation of a defence industry.

Second, it occurs to me from listening to his remarks that he described the loss of jobs in this sector as a social catastrophe. I agree with him, if he means that any unemployment is catastrophic to the persons involved.

We have experienced over the last number of years many job losses in Canada in many sectors. We have seen it most recently in the fisheries in Atlantic Canada. We have seen it, although it is recovering well right now, in the automotive sector in Ontario. We have seen it in industries in western Canada. As we

live at the moment with 11.5 per cent unemployment, 1.5 million Canadians out of work, for those people it is a catastrophe.

I suggest however it is no greater catastrophe for those in the defence industry than for those in any other industry. What we really are talking about—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Order. I know that members feel very strongly about these issues. Of course this is the place for that debate to take place, but I think we all want to do it in such a fashion that we maintain the respect of all our constituents.

In all fairness to members on either side of the House, given the strong views, I would ask members to allow one another to debate and I will do my utmost to maintain that debate in the most respectful fashion.

Mr. Manley: Mr. Speaker, I have three children at home. I am used to talking when others are talking, so it is not really a problem for me and there are children here too.

The other comment I make arising out of the remarks of the member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve is the notion which appears to underlie his basic thesis which is that we should give money to individual firms in order to assist them in converting.

He mentions DIPP and that is an important tool of industrial development. In fact it has historically given money to firms. As we revise DIPP, and I will say more about this in a few moments, what we have been doing is essentially making DIPP a refundable, repayable contribution to assist firms in developing products for markets.

There is quite a distinction between a strategic approach to an industrial sector and one which focuses on bailing out particular firms by writing cheques for taxpayers' money.

As we talk about defence conversion most members will agree that what we have here is a very complex process. I do not think there are simple answers or formulas. Furthermore Canada's position with respect to defence conversion is unique among industrialized nations. The hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve and many of his colleagues need to be informed about exactly what it is we are attempting to do. Let me try to provide some perspective on just where we are coming from in Canada in this area of industrial conversion.

• (1055)

In the red book we stated that many opportunities are available for industries which recognize and exploit the trends in global markets. We knew that the time had come to help defence industries to make the transition from high tech military production to high tech civilian production.