

Regional Unemployment

our programs and, at the same time, to implement already existing programs administered by the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce through the Federal Business Development Bank at the federal level, and to set up mechanisms which are already in place at the provincial level and which are provided by their own agency, that is their own Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce. Mr. Speaker, the great co-ordinators on the opposite side who look forward to correcting the lack of co-ordination in Canada cannot even co-ordinate their minds on that matter.

● (1640)

[English]

Now, Mr. Speaker, let me turn to the second of the government's policy themes in regional development. Since 1972-73 and after the decentralization of the department which resulted in 70 per cent of our senior executive officers moving to the regions, the government moved to negotiate with each province a general development agreement. The exception would, of course, be Prince Edward Island which has a 15-year comprehensive development plan. These general agreements state in broad terms the development priorities of each province as agreed to by each provincial government. They are reviewed and discussed regularly with each province. We and the provinces know that development problems are not going to be solved overnight. The agreements are ten-year strategies. Under these agreements we enter into subsidiary agreements with each province designed to maximize the development potential of a specific sector of the provincial economy or a specific geographic area. Again, these agreements represent the priorities of the province as agreed to by each provincial government.

This GDA subagreement approach is only two years old, yet we have managed to sign some 66 subagreements across the country, committing over \$1.1 billion of federal funds. The federal share of these agreements runs between 50 per cent and 90 per cent. The provinces have committed over half a billion dollars, and private industry over half a billion dollars, for a total development commitment under DREE, GDA programs of over \$2 billion. This is what the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) calls on the fringe of government priorities.

Our critics call for local involvement in decision-making. They call for more powers to the provinces. What better way is there to involve the provinces than to sit down with them and negotiate face to face with hard dollar commitments on a province by province basis? Do the members opposite mean to say that provincial governments do not understand the interests and priorities of their provinces? Does the Leader of the Opposition know what he means? The provinces and the people of Canada will want to know just who he thinks he is fooling.

An hon. Member: Who do you think you are fooling?

An hon. Member: Don't be so partisan.

[Mr. Lessard.]

Mr. Lessard: Now let me speak of co-ordination within the federal government. The hon. members opposite claim, with-out reference to the facts, that DREE plays no co-ordinating role. Let us look at some of the examples of how we have implemented our policy theme of research, analysis, co-ordination and liaison to which I referred earlier. A great deal of time and effort has been spent on research and analysis the primary goal of which was to assemble information which would be useful to other departments and the cabinet in pursuing a wide range of federal policies. This was done as a simple result of the stated government commitment to regional development as a policy crucial to national unity and the national interest.

Let me give a few examples where the opposition can find none. The government has launched a program of decentralization of certain government units. This is not a DREE program, but DREE has provided essential expertise to treasury board. Our analysis plays a key role in determining the suitability of towns and cities across the country for relocation. Our information has helped ensure that units and locations were well matched and that the development needs of slow growth areas were well served by the moves. This is co-ordination.

There are more examples. When we negotiate a subsidiary agreement with a province in an area where another federal government department has an interest, that other government department is usually involved from conception, through negotiation, to signing. They often sit on the management committee which implements the agreement. In Quebec alone this is true, for example, with the agreements on forestry, agriculture, minerals, industrial infrastructure, highways and PICA.

In the Newfoundland minerals agreement not only did the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources participate from conception to signing, not only did they sit on the management committee but, as well, they cost-shared the funding of the agreement with DREE and the province. That is co-ordination. I could list many subagreements that we sign with two, three, four and even five federal departments involved with the provinces and two or three departments in those provinces. Again, that is consultation, decision and co-ordination.

An hon. Member: Tell us about the 50 per cent failure.

Mr. Lessard: When you never try, my friend, you never fail. That was the record of your party when you were in power. You did not dare to try, and even so you failed miserably.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, I also want to say that we work in close cooperation with other departments with respect to our program of direct aid to industry. We consult the Departments of Industry, Trade and Commerce, Environment, Fisheries, Agriculture, Manpower, Immigration, as well as others before making our decisions. We also have representatives on the committees approving the grants under certain programs of the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce. For example, in anticipation of the withdrawal of U.S. Armed Forces