

Supply

If I had been next to the Prime Minister, I would have whispered this to him: "Mr. Prime Minister, during the election and even before that, when you were in the opposition, you gave us a lot of hope and made a lot of great promises concerning industrial conversion programs and when you cancelled the helicopter contract, you should have proposed that program, but you did not." That is a mistake the Prime Minister should have mentioned to the reporters, yesterday, when he was taking stock of his first six months in office.

The Prime Minister and the Liberal government on the other side have so—I am tempted to say—lied to us, if I may, although it may be too strong a term in this House, but this is almost the case. I could quote government members when they were in the opposition, as well as provincial members. When it was in the opposition, the Liberal Party was a keen advocate of conversion. They wanted an assistance program that would help businesses to take over other markets than the defence market.

So, they promised to develop a program to help businesses move away from military production. The Liberals reiterated their promise in the red book. Almost every day in Question Period, the Prime Minister continuously refers to his red book and the need to create jobs, jobs and more jobs.

And yet, once in office, all these good intentions went unheeded, so much so that even the Martin budget said nothing about a conversion program for defence businesses.

On the other hand, the Prime Minister speaks a lot of his famous infrastructure program. If it creates jobs, that is great.

• (1250)

The infrastructure program will create about 45,000 jobs. But what good will it do to create 45,000 jobs, temporary jobs that will last six months or a year, if the government allows 60,000 existing jobs to be lost in our military industries and allows plants to close permanently? I think that the government could have kept a portion of the one billion dollars it will invest in its infrastructure program and used it to help the 60,000 workers in the defence industries keep their jobs. What good will it do to create one job if two are lost elsewhere? We are not moving forward by doing that, we are going backwards.

On March 26 1993, some MPs, namely Mr. Axworthy, Mr. Rompkey and Mr. Peterson, said—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Order. I simply want to repeat once again that, in this House, people must be referred to by their title, such as parliamentary secretary or hon. member for such-and-such a riding, and not by their name.

Mr. Lavigne (Beauharnois—Salaberry): Mr. Speaker, I was not sure if I should name them, but I am reading a text dated March 1993, when these people were not in government. Anyway, it is these three Liberal members, who were in opposition at the time, who said that the military businesses assistance program had to be reformed for the conversion of these businesses to civilian production.

They said jointly: "It is necessary to expand the mandate of Industry, Science and Technology Canada's \$200 million Defence Industry Productivity Program (DIPP) which is aimed at developing defence technology". There already is a \$200 million assistance program for military businesses, but as the members said at the time, it was necessary "to add to that program a new component that will help the industry convert and diversify into areas such as environmental technologies and high-tech peacekeeping technologies". The Liberals said that. They were encouraging our defence industries to penetrate the environmental sector.

Let us take as an example a business in the riding of Beauharnois, Expro, which manufactures gunpowder and shells and which, for the past few years, has been taking part in a soil decontamination program. Those people are now struggling to survive, since 70 per cent of their orders were government defense production orders. Now that they hardly get any such orders, they have to redirect their operations. They are now working on a soil decontamination program, which is related to the whole question of environment.

However, they need support, they need studies and research, and the government could and should get involved in that area. Otherwise, what will happen to those people who worked for many years at making gunpowder and shells and who are hardly making any today? We know also that the company had major sales on the United States market; they had many orders from the United States. But the Americans too are tightening their arms program and have significantly reduced their orders, and therefore the orders for Expro are going down.

Going further than what the Liberals were saying when they formed the Opposition, the present Prime Minister did not hesitate to say that defence industries were industries of the past. Liberals were saying that Canadians deserved a government that could show the way, a government that could bring forth new ideas and new strategies, a government that could help them adapt to change.

• (1255)

The defence conversion policy is an example of how a Liberal government intends to meet the needs of Canadians in the 1990s. That is what the present Prime Minister constantly repeated during the campaign and when he was Leader of the Opposition.