

We know that, as far as regional economic development is concerned, for the past year the Government has made several announcements about setting up agencies in Western Canada, Atlantic Canada and Northern Ontario, and there again, Quebec was left out in the cold.

I want to ask the Minister when he intends to announce a real program for Quebec?

Hon. Robert de Cotret (Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion and Minister of State for Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, I can inform the Hon. Member that as far as regional economic development is concerned, Quebec is certainly not lagging behind other regions in this country.

In fact, when we consider the contribution made by this Department in Quebec in recent years, it is clear that it constitutes a very adequate percentage, and the same applies to research and development.

PHASE II OF EASTERN QUEBEC DEVELOPMENT PLAN—
MINISTER'S POSITION

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Shefford): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary. That is all very well, but we know that as of March 31, for instance, Phase II of the Eastern Quebec development plan expired, and that the Minister promised to make an announcement before that date. Today, there is still no news, and although the Minister responsible for the region kept saying the announcement would be made by March 31, nothing has been done.

Could the Minister please explain why he is dragging his feet?

Hon. Robert de Cotret (Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion and Minister of State for Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, for the first time, unlike the previous Government, we are setting up a comprehensive development plan for the entire province of Quebec. Unlike the previous Government, we have respected the constitutional jurisdictions of both levels of government. We have been engaged in active discussions with Quebec for the past six weeks, with a view to reaching a joint agreement that will help peripheral areas, central Quebec, the Montreal metropolitan region and in fact the entire province.

As for the date of the official announcement, I can inform the Hon. Member that we intend to extend the plan for Eastern Quebec. There is no doubt about that. However, we do not want to restrict our regional development initiatives to a specific region. We will have a comprehensive plan with sub-plans, and the announcement should be made very shortly. We are waiting until discussions with Quebec have been concluded.

Oral Questions

[English]

AIR CANADA

JOBS—POSSIBILITY OF DOWNSIZING

Mr. Iain Angus (Thunder Bay—Atikokan): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Right Hon. Prime Minister and it concerns employment guarantees at Air Canada.

The Government has indicated it will instruct the Chairman of Air Canada to vote with the majority of public shareholders. Given that, what protection is there for the workers in various centres across Canada, including Winnipeg, that under this new situation, should it be approved by this House, the minority shareholders will not direct Air Canada to downsize, consolidate maintenance facilities, and reduce services? What will prevent that from occurring if the Government is prepared to give full control of Air Canada to that very small group of people who may buy shares?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I think the Hon. Member would agree that what is desirable and what is required from the airline is that it be a healthy, productive and growing airline. We will be giving it the mechanisms to do just that. As the Chairman of Air Canada indicated at the press conference yesterday, and I think I quote him correctly, this initiative will be good for the employees—

Mr. Waddell: It will be good for him.

Mr. Mazankowski:—good for customers, good for communities and good for Canada.

I hear some smart remark to the effect that it will be good for him. I think that is a great disservice to a man who has distinguished himself and provided over 40 years of dedicated service from the bottom right up to the top. I think, rather than snarky remarks like that, the Hon. Member should be praising the man for the leadership and inspiration he has given.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Angus: Mr. Speaker, it is clear from the Minister's answer that the Government is not prepared to provide any guarantees. In his own words, it will be a clear arm's length relationship and there is no way to protect existing employees, routes, and facilities because the Government will let that small group of shareholders tell Air Canada what to do.

REQUEST FOR LEGISLATIVE GUARANTEES

Mr. Iain Angus (Thunder Bay—Atikokan): Mr. Speaker, is the Deputy Prime Minister prepared to stand in this House today and indicate that in the legislation he is bringing forward there will be a clause that will guarantee existing facilities, routes, and services? Is he prepared to make that guarantee?

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Was this question planned, Nelson?