

Supply

• (1540)

Mr. Valcourt: I want to thank the Member for his lesson in how we should address the issue contained in the motion before us today. We should not be political. I invite him to speak to his caucus colleagues. If he had listened to what his colleagues stated this morning in the House, perhaps he would react a little differently.

I happen to agree with the Hon. Member. We should be fair and reasonable and look at the problems in Atlantic Canada, instead of condemning the Government for doing what it is doing now, which I suggest to the Hon. Member is a lot more than has ever been done in the history of Canada. Members rise and blame the Government and my colleague, the Minister of Public Works (Mr. MacKay). The only thing that we are guilty of as a Government is increasing the spending in Atlantic Canada to a record level of \$425 million a year.

Ms. Clancy: Take the blinkers off.

Mr. Valcourt: The Hon. Member should talk to his colleagues and tell them not to be partisan. We have put in place, together with the provincial Governments, ways whereby we can address those issues.

When the Hon. Member states that he deplors the fact that it is heartbreaking to see a region rely solely on one commodity, such as cod, I welcome him to Canada. Look at the farmers in western Canada who were affected by the drought. What was the response of the Government? Today, some members of his Party suggested that this was only a political scam to buy votes in western Canada. I suggest to the Hon. Member that he go and see the farmers on the land. They know.

In Atlantic Canada we are facing a crisis with the depletion of the fish stocks. The colleagues of the Hon. Member are blaming the Government because the fish are disappearing from the sea.

Ms. Clancy: By magic, or overfishing?

Mr. Valcourt: We will let Canadians decide. We have to ask ourselves how we can cope with the situation. That is why, well in advance of this issue being raised in the House, the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) appointed a special subcommittee of Cabinet to deal with the situation in Atlantic Canada. I believe that that is the positive way to deal with the problems there. There are other

problems. I fully agree with the Hon. Member. We will have a chat one day, because I like his attitude. However, he should talk to his colleagues in Atlantic Canada. I know they outnumber the others from elsewhere in Canada.

Ms. Clancy: There is a reason for that, too.

Mr. Valcourt: Provided there is goodwill there, we can do a lot to improve the situation in Atlantic Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Questions and comments are now terminated. On debate, the Hon. Member for Restigouche.

Mr. Guy H. Arseneault (Restigouche): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the House to give this speech in support of the motion of the Hon. Member for Gander—Grand Falls (Mr. Baker).

What we are debating is the federal Government's harsh treatment of Atlantic Canada. Since the last federal election, for some reason, the Atlantic region seems to have been earmarked by the Tory Government. Indeed, the Government has initiated a series of policies that are causing unprecedented economic devastation to Atlantic Canada.

The Tory Government has repeatedly declared its support for what it called "sacred trusts", such as universality of social programs, railway transportation, and regional development, only to go back on its word time and time again.

For example, a few weeks ago the Government attempted to convince the people of Canada that regional spending was not being cut, that it was actually increasing. It is completely beyond me how the Government can claim that it is not a budget cut to spread a five-year spending program over seven years. The facts confirm that the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency will have its \$1.05 billion budget stretched over six or seven years. That is a drop of up to 29 per cent in average annual spending. If that is not a cut, I do not know what it is.

The truth is that the Atlantic provinces are already facing a nearly disastrous situation, with the disemboweling of VIA Rail and the reduced fishing quotas. Add to that a reduction in ACOA spending, and one has a recipe for a very serious situation indeed.