

created. But what about jobs by the thousands in parts of Canada where they are really needed?

I believe the kinds of speeches which have been made today are significant. The hon. member for York-Sunbury (Mr. Howie) made an important point about infrastructure and investment. If my hon. friend from Timiskaming had not had to leave he would have spoken on this topic. He feels that when grants are given some attention to equity should be paid, and that they should not just be handouts.

So, Mr. Speaker, I make my appeal to the minister. No doubt he felt it was a great day when he was called to the cabinet and given all the privileges and perquisites which go with his position. But I suggest to him that his job is not merely one of carrying on a bogged down administration, not one merely to keep the bureaucracy going. His job is to bring about a return to the high ideals and enthusiasm which were so apparent when we decided to establish the Department of Regional Economic Expansion. Lessening economic disparities in this country is a tremendous goal. I hope the minister sees that as a challenge he must meet.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner (London East)): Order, please. If the minister speaks now he will close the debate.

[Translation]

Hon. Marcel Lessard (Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Mr. Speaker, first I should like to thank my colleagues who have taken part in the debate, more especially for their kind words, their congratulations and their wishes of success in my new work.

I can assure them that I will not delay the debate further. I have taken note of all questions raised by hon. members. For example, the hon. member for Central Nova (Mr. MacKay) wonders if the new bill will have some effect on the applications which have already reached the department. Surely not, I can reassure him in that respect. We have taken some commitments and we will comply with them. It is precisely because we think that we will be making some new ones in the next few weeks that we hope the bill will soon be passed.

He mentioned, of course, the present economic issues that have implications on departmental activities. Everyone is aware of this, but our department is not the only one involved since all government activities are affected. The economic conditions are responsible for these difficulties. On the other hand, I am convinced that our department will emerge all the greater from this new experience and will continue as in the past to be most active in the areas where the need for our programs is the greatest.

For instance, the hon. member puts the following question: Why ask for a five-year extension? Because we believe it is necessary. The extension for a five-year period will give the government time to review its program, if need be, but especially will enable the businesses already in touch with the department to continue their research work, their market studies and projects. Then, they can be sure that if they submit a proposal in six, fifteen or eighteen months, the act will be in effect and they may obtain the assistance provided under the act.

The hon. member for York Sunbury (Mr. Howie) is highly interested in infrastructures. He warns me against a tendency I could have of favouring the development of

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industries over that of infrastructures. I could simply point out to him that infrastructures and their development represent a very important area and it goes without saying that the department committed itself in general agreements on present development to further expansion and it established infrastructures. I want to make very clear, however, that infrastructures, as important as they may be in slow growth areas where we would like to see expansion, will be justified only to the extent there is hope for ensuing industrial development to create new jobs, generally improve the standard of living and stabilize if not increase the population in those areas.

There are certainly a score of projects the department could take into consideration. That of the Bay of Fundy is an obvious one. We know that this is a very extensive project which has been on the planning board for several years. He suggests that the department which I head ought to be the foreman for this great project. He suggests also that we should forget about all other projects to concentrate our operation and financial resources on the development of large scale projects, such as building a tidal power plant at the Bay of Fundy.

If we were to accept his suggestion, if we were to concentrate our efforts on these great projects as a priority and turn down all opportunities for action which are being offered to us during our bargaining sessions with provincial governments—especially those of the Atlantic coast—I think that we should miss a great many fine occasions to improve the social and economic conditions of these regions, to help establish new plants and create new jobs.

● (1510)

Of course, such a project is important and will have to go through further developments. However, he has mentioned that the good years of the Diefenbaker government's regime had given rise to great expectations for the Atlantic region with the setting up of the Atlantic Development Council.

Without wanting to pass judgment on nor criticize the proposal of the time, I must say that I was a member of the House when the Diefenbaker government brought in this proposal in 1962 and that when that agency was set up it sounded all right in principle, but it had in fact no power at all and particularly no budget to work with; it is only with the advent of the Liberal government in 1963 and on the instigation of the then member for Bonavista-Twillin-gate, the hon. Mr. Pickersgill, that that agency has been modified in order to be provided with very substantial funds allowing it to work in the areas which had been assigned to it by the previous government. Thus, I think that the Liberal government has been more generous than the Progressive Conservative government of the time in this area.

As regards the other criticism on that question of cooperation between the two departments, I must say here that when policies were revised, it was agreed that we would try to better coordinate our activities with those of other federal and provincial departments. And that is something we achieved to a high degree in the last years. The auxiliary agreements we reached with the provinces clearly indicate that the Department of Regional Economic Expansion is involved with two, three—four in one case recently