

Ottawa and asking for deep-water ports. Development both in Nova Scotia and in New Brunswick has been given little impetus on that particular front.

What then, is the government saying about regional development? Some of the things the minister has been saying—I am sorry he is not here this evening to hear my speech, but I am sure he and his officials will read it—are very good. There have been occasions when all members of the House, I think, would like to rise in collective applause because the minister has accurately gauged a number of difficulties which have existed over the last 4½ dozen years with regard to the administration of regional development policies.

What is disturbing is not the minister's rhetoric but the limited response of the department and the conflicting signals which increasingly have come out of the department. For more than a year we have heard that one of the vital steps to be taken in implementing new regional development policies involves the decentralization of the Department of Regional Economic Expansion. The concept of decentralization is close to the heart of most of the provinces of this country, certainly those at our country's extremities. It was announced with great fanfare that decentralization would take place, that instead of 70 per cent of the federal department being in Ottawa and 30 per cent being in the field, the ratios would be reversed and 30 per cent of the work force of the department would remain in Ottawa while 70 per cent would be dispersed across Canada.

However, we have heard disquieting stories month after month to the effect that senior, key officials are unwilling to leave Ottawa for a variety of reasons. I do not want to focus attention on any individual. The general impression that has been left is that the department is not strongly committed to the idea that this would be a tremendous departure and an important new step in the implementation of new development policies. Also, there were far too many stories to be discounted totally as rumours, to the effect that morale within the department had sagged to an alarming degree. We are hearing far too many reports saying that creative input within the department is either being frozen out or stifled.

Without taking issue with any of the personalities involved, I suggest that the fact that the most important man in the department next to the minister, the deputy minister, is described as the acting deputy minister, is revealing. There are always good reasons for employing people in a temporary capacity. A department might go through a transition period lasting a few weeks or even a few months. But one does not permanently describe a man filling a permanent position as "acting". Neither the government nor the department have indicated why this should be so. So, Mr. Speaker, the government, by saying in the Speech from the Throne that it attaches great importance to regional development, is apparently ready to accept its commitment. On the other hand it is, on other fronts, sending out conflicting and disturbing signals.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on the matter of regional development as a composite part of the government's responsibility. That is also a responsibility of all members of this House. It is particularly timely that I should raise this topic because earlier today, in prepara-

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tion for the national meeting of our party which will take place later this month, there was released a background paper on regional development. It represents the thoughts of some members of this House as well as the thoughts of those who work with the party in attempting to formulate party policy positions on a number of fronts. I shall refer to this report in a few moments because I think it outlines some of those things which we feel are crucial to the development of an effective policy and program of regional development.

● (2120)

I think it is beyond question that Canada in its very essence is a vast, beautiful and, as we have learned again, resource-filled country. By an accident of birth, however, great numbers of people live in areas or regions of Canada which share only marginally in the social and economic development of this country. Attempts to reduce inter-regional economic disparities and to equalize economic opportunities facing Canadians have been carried on with increasing concern during the past few decades. Indeed, attempts in this connection date back to the very beginnings of this century when Sir Wilfrid Laurier, as prime minister, in 1906 called a resource conference. It was actually a conference sponsored by the Canadian Forestry Association which led to the formation in 1910 of a commission of conservation. Many years later—far too many, I would think—a second resource conference was held in Canada. That was in 1954. It was sponsored by the Canadian Institute of Forestry, the Agricultural Institute of Canada, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce and the Engineering Institute of Canada.

The focusing of regional development as a basic responsibility of the federal government in this country began dramatically in the sixties with the holding of the resources for tomorrow conference in 1961 under the leadership of the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker). That conference was geared specifically to the study of the integrated, multiple use of renewable resources. It was jointly sponsored by the federal and provincial governments. Surely in the course of the past 13 years we should have learned that if we are going to wrestle satisfactorily with regional development, it can only be done as we recognize the important input of other levels of government, as well as the private sector. Far too often, short-sighted and limited attempts in regional development activity have been put forth which did not take into account the important co-operation of and relationship to other effective inputs in the economic and social sectors.

It is interesting to note that at the 1961 resources for tomorrow conference, 18 papers were presented on all aspects of regional development. From that period through to the late sixties there were a number of programs which flowed out of the kind of momentum which developed from that national conference. It was like alphabet soup: we had AIDA, ADB, FRED and ARDA. In 1969, in a mandate which it said was vital, the present government set up the Department of Regional Economic Expansion. I think that move was basically in the right direction, attempting to integrate and pull together a variety of programs that were spread across a whole group of departments. Some programs were actually working against each