

Government Organization Act, 1983

focused on regional problems with the elimination of departments set up to study and resolve them.

My question is not on that broad issue. It is about the element in the Bill that will allow senators to become parliamentary secretaries. I want to ask this Parliament Secretary what justification, under the greatest parliamentary interpretation, is there to have senators become parliamentary secretaries under this Bill? This Member is not a bad Parliamentary Secretary, as far as that goes. Will he use the intellectual acumen that he sometimes displays, stand up in the House and say that the reason this reorganization Bill will allow senators to become parliamentary secretaries, which is almost a contradiction in terms, is that there are no Members on the other side of the House who have the ability, acumen or competence to be such creatures?

Mr. Peterson: Mr. Speaker, I have two comments. First, I will take the Hon. Member's comments as a representation that he would very much like an appointment to the Senate. I, along with all Members of this House, have been very impressed with many of the representations he has made in the past. We look forward to long service on behalf of the people of Canada from this Member in whatever House.

I want to respond to the preamble in which the Hon. Member indicated that the abolition of DREE will not enable the Government and the people of Canada to focus on regional economic development concerns. I make the following points.

Yes, we have eliminated that one ministry, but we have created a new ministry to replace it. The new ministry replacing it is the one headed by the Minister of State for Economic Development and Minister of State for Science and Technology (Mr. Johnston). In that capacity, he will not be working alone; he will be using his role as chairman of the economic and regional development committee of Cabinet to co-ordinate the efforts of all the Ministers who have an economic portfolio. In this way regional development needs will become priorities. There will not be as in the past just one Minister, but many Ministers plus a whole Cabinet committee, plus the ministry itself.

What we have done is augment Cabinet's capacity to deal with the specific issues in the regions, including the region the Hon. Member is particularly concerned with, Atlantic Canada. Second, we have given increased funding to deal with these areas. Third, we have a new mechanism so that decisions are not made on all of these projects here in Ottawa.

We have very strong co-ordinators in each of the regions and Provinces so that we will be closer to the people, closer to small business, closer to provincial needs as determined by the provincial Governments. We will be closer to the people who have the input to make.

Mr. Nowlan: What about the parliamentary secretaries?

Mr. Lambert: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Parliamentary Secretary whether he feels that in the last 20 years there has been a substantial playing of musical chairs with, among others, DREE. In 1964 we saw the coming forward of

the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce as the logical spin-off from Trade and Commerce. Ultimately we saw the development of DREE as a full Department. I trust the Parliamentary Secretary will note the hundreds of millions of dollars that have been poured into various regions of the country with, admittedly on his own remarks this morning, little or no effect. He claims that we still have a real problem in Canada.

Will the Parliamentary Secretary tell me how this new section of a Department with provincial commissioners replacing former provincial directors, who allegedly were to work with the provincial Governments, will improve the situation? Will we not see a continuation of the pouring of hundreds of millions of dollars into bottomless wells?

Mr. Peterson: Mr. Speaker, in responding to the concerns of the Hon. Member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert), it would be irresponsible for me to claim that every bit of federal money spent in a particular region will produce the benefits that all of us would hope. We are human beings. Just because there is that challenge, it does not mean that we should give up our efforts of trying to maximize the return to all taxpayers, particularly to those in the region affected, those who want the jobs, those who are looking to the projects that we, in co-operation with other groups fund in order to build a better economic infrastructure.

The prospect of failure should not deter us. Rather, as the Hon. Member is suggesting, it is something that requires mechanisms to try to minimize the possibility of failure. This is why I believe that the new system with the federal economic commissioners in the region, working with the people on the spot who best know the priorities, difficulties and concerns, in consultation not only with the provincial Governments and among the federal Departments but with the private sector, with citizens and businesses in that particular area, will minimize those situations in which the return is not exactly what we would hope.

Lastly, and I think this is important, in the last year of operation DREE has a budget of \$680 million. This represented only 8.8 per cent of the federal Government's total economic development spending of about \$7.7 billion. With this approach, we are not only enhancing the mechanism to ensure that the Hon. Member's concerns are met, but we are also increasing in hard dollars our commitment to our concern for the people in those regions.

● (1230)

Hon. J. Robert Howie (York-Sunbury): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to participate in this debate. I appreciate the excellent comments that have been made by all of my colleagues who have preceded me.

The division of DREE into two parts and its burial in two other departments of Government is not a matter for rejoicing in the areas of Canada that suffer most from problems of regional disparity. With the passage of this Bill, the Government's commitment to addressing the problems of regional