

58(4)(a) should, in my opinion, be modified so as to allow backbenchers in particular more lead time for participating in debate in a meaningful way and preparing researched speeches.

● (1720)

With the heavy work load already on our shoulders in committees and our two offices, not to mention all sorts of other meetings, the present situation is not at all in our favour. Of course, there is an advantage here to the opposition which I am prepared to recognize in an adversary situation. That may be as it should be. It is a gain for them, but it is a loss for the total House if all backbenchers are not given sufficient advance notice.

On the other side of the coin, with today's motion there is cancellation of a scheduled meeting on DREE estimates. We were to examine the Ontario expenditures and programs of the department. However, that motion had to be set back one week because the minister was to be our principal witness. The motion, therefore, came rather suddenly for the committee and its members. We would have appreciated some advance notice. Speaking as a member of this House and not as the chairman of the regional development committee, I find it regrettable that the committee was not allowed to complete its examination of the estimates as well as its study of the Economic Council of Canada report on regional disparities. In that sense, I feel that today's proceedings are untimely and premature, in addition to being staged on short notice.

However, I am prepared to deal with the motion. One thing in the wording that I find annoying is the reference to "the government's abandonment of its commitment to develop strong regional economies". The motion would have made some sense in terms of equilibrium and fairness if it had addressed itself to the role of all levels of government, not just the federal government, in their combined and essentially co-operative efforts to combat perennial regional disparities.

I have on my desk and in my mind, as I am sure do other members, a number of examples which will serve to demonstrate that the provincial administrations were found, and are still found, wanting in their co-operative efforts with the Department of Regional Economic Expansion.

[*Translation*]

First, Mr. Speaker, I cannot keep from noticing with all possible objectivity and charity that some provinces are far from fully playing their role in this joint effort against inequalities to which the federal government has resolutely addressed itself and on which the present minister is also actively working. I cannot accept that the central government should be blamed for everything, if blame is justified.

There are yet too many partisan considerations in the establishment of provincial policies and in the wording of development agreements. The provinces do not always show the goodwill and the determination which are indeed necessary for the implementation of concerted action schemes. While there are remarkably able people in many provincial jurisdictions, it is a fact—and the provinces should admit it in all

Regional Unemployment

humility—that they do not yet have at their disposal all the experts needed for identifying their priorities, for recommending appropriate solutions and quite often for carrying out programs.

It is not my intention to minimize everything that has been accomplished or attempted up to now by the provinces, by themselves or in co-operation with the federal authorities. There have been remarkable successes, but also, dismal failures; there have also been projects which did not even get started because, in my opinion, the required expertise, technology, and staff did not exist.

I merely say that in the area of regional development, the provinces, and unfortunately, most of the time the have-not provinces, do not yet have at their disposal the required staff, technology and administrative support. The mover of the motion, the hon. member for Egmont (Mr. MacDonald), said earlier in the debate that the federal government must show leadership in the area of regional development. I will tell him very simply, for maybe the minister was too humble to say it, that this is what we have been doing since 1968, Mr. Speaker. This government has shown leadership since 1968; it has fully fulfilled, in my opinion, election promises after election promises. Perhaps it did not know how to come up to all our expectations, or it has not been able to, but it has definitely shown leadership. However, the hon. member for Egmont must recognize, as the Minister told him earlier, that in our federal system, this leadership cannot be and should not be imposed unilaterally on the provinces—at the risk of hearing those very same opposition members and the provincial premiers clamouring that we are trampling on the provinces, that we are making a farce of their powers, that we fail to respect their jurisdictions.

The crux of the problem and of the challenge which confront all governments is to find a compromise and seek a magic formula which would satisfy everybody in respect of jurisdictions. I am convinced that the people from the Atlantic provinces are sick and tired of listening to the whining of the opposition parties and editorialists, all snug and cozy in their offices, suggesting that DREE has fallen short of its objectives. In fact, I believe that the good and honest public will readily admit now that DREE effectively contributed in a very positive way to the development of the economic potential of the Atlantic provinces. No miracle has been accomplished yet by the Department of Regional Economic Expansion nor have the incumbent Minister and any of his predecessors, for that matter, yet been canonized.

Some hon. Members: It is coming, though.

Mr. Corbin: But I would simply like to say to the Minister not to get discouraged, not to despair, as I believe he is going in the right direction. Anyway, canonization is never achieved during one's lifetime. Of course, Mr. Speaker, we expect a greater participation from DREE. But we are not simplistic enough or candid enough to believe that DREE can succeed in its mission, in spite of the provinces.