

Adjournment Debate

Board had approved the expenditure of \$500,000 to enable this transfer.

One of the unfortunate aspects of the whole situation is why this is being done. Is it simply to implement the policy that was established in the past when reasons for it may have existed, or is it being done simply to satisfy the special concerns and needs of members of the Liberal Party who represent these various areas of the Province of Nova Scotia? For that reason it is important to review the history of the matter.

Prior to 1979 the Liberal Government proposed the decentralization of government offices. That would have an understandable effect on government employees who would have to be transferred to these new locations. In 1979 when the Right Hon. Joe Clark became Prime Minister, a review was conducted of these proposals. The then President of the Treasury Board decided that in the interests of economy some of the proposals to decentralize and transfer employees would be scrapped. One of the proposals, namely, that of the previous Minister of National Health and Welfare, to transfer employees of the Income and Securities Branch at three locations across Canada to new locations, was scrapped. In 1979, the idea of moving employees from Halifax to Sydney was not only delayed but was actually abandoned.

The Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) revised that proposal in June 1982, for two reasons. First, she said she wanted to integrate the staff dealing with the Canada Pension Plan, family allowances and old age security, and, second, she wanted to help create jobs.

The Public Service Alliance of Canada has given a full and complete answer to the Minister's proposal with respect to these transfers. It indicated that the transfers would involve \$34 million and that the money could be spent more effectively on job creation and other programs. That should have been a complete answer. It was also clear that no benefit was to be derived from this transfer with respect to the more efficient administration of the programs.

● (1750)

As my colleague from Cape Breton and the Sydneys knows, I have the greatest admiration for Cape Breton, and the people in it. However, Halifax is the capital of Nova Scotia. It is the central spot and programs of this kind can be more effectively administered from that location.

However, Mr. Speaker, that is not my only concern. The fact is that there is a human element in this. The transfer involves over 60 employees, most of whom are in the low paid clerical bracket. In fact, over two-thirds of the employees involved earn between \$14,000 and \$21,000 in their clerical classifications. These are not the kinds of employees who can easily relocate to a totally different part of the Province, into a totally different atmosphere. In most cases, they are members of families who would not be involved in the relocation, second income earners, in some cases, who would prefer to remain with their spouses in the area in which they have perhaps lived their lifetimes. Notwithstanding these human considerations,

government officials, aided and abetted by their political superiors, have charged on and sought to effect this transfer.

I stand here to appeal to the Minister of National Health and Welfare, who apparently is the authority involved, and to the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Gray), to the extent the Treasury Board is involved, to stop this unnecessary action right now. I understand that out of 23 employees involved in this transfer who were advised they must make a decision to move from Halifax to Sydney, 17 have refused to make the move. They have some benefits under Treasury Board regulations but, by and large, those benefits will not be effective because there are no jobs available in the federal public service in the Halifax area, nor, indeed, in the whole of the Nova Scotia and Atlantic regions. They are not going to be able to take advantage to any great extent of vacancies which might occur from time to time. In most cases it will simply result in the loss of their employment. In cases where the employees do make the transfer, they will be going to an environment which may be hostile to them at their particular stage of life.

My final request is an appeal to the authorities in government and in Parliament to end this move, to review the whole situation and decide that it is in the public interest to allow these employees to remain at their present location in Halifax.

Mr. Russell MacLellan (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I take great pleasure in replying to the remarks of the Hon. Member for Halifax West (Mr. Crosby). I can assure him that the employees who are decentralized from Halifax to Sydney will not be going to a hostile environment. In fact, they will be treated most cordially and hospitably, as are all people who visit Cape Breton Island. The employees who will be decentralized number between 75 and 85.

This is a very important decentralization for Sydney. Sydney has a very high unemployment rate, as has the whole industrialized area of Cape Breton. This decentralization will not only create a federal presence on Cape Breton Island, not only create jobs which are badly needed, but because these jobs will be located in downtown Sydney it will help create a catalyst for the redevelopment of the downtown area.

The Hon. Member is right in one thing he said. The President of the Treasury Board under the former Tory administration did cancel the decentralization of Health and Welfare from Halifax to Sydney. When Hon. Members talk about patronage in ridings which are held by Liberal Members, then I feel the most blatant example of patronage which I have seen was the cancellation during the Clark administration of the decentralization to only those ridings in which there were Liberal Members.

The money which would be used for this decentralization cannot be better used, Mr. Speaker. These are permanent jobs and these jobs will have a spin-off with respect to the whole economy of the industrialized area of Cape Breton. The employees who are presently working with income security in Halifax, Mr. Speaker, have been given notice of the decentralized move. The decentralized move is not beginning until