

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

stand the examination of critics. It must also be able to withstand the constructive criticism that can only help the program.

The *Evening Telegram* for October 14, 1971, carried a press despatch, again a Canadian Press despatch, headlined "Government prepared to withdraw DREE, Marchand tells critics" and in a direct quotation reports the minister as saying:

But if it is established that our whole program is not serving any useful purpose, of course we will withdraw it.

The minister made a similar statement a few months previous to this in Charlottetown when he met with the premiers of the three maritime provinces. I maintain that the minister should be addressing himself to this problem and responding and reacting to the constructive criticism that have been levelled at the program both in this House and across the country. Cynical though the minister is, he knows we all want this program to work. It must work. It is our only hope. In the Atlantic provinces it is the only program we have; consequently, we want to try to improve it.

This is why we direct constructive criticism at the minister. However, we are frustrated in our attempts because the minister refuses to answer questions in this House. He also refuses to respond to the recommendations made by his own agencies, agencies that have been empowered by Parliament under statute to advise the minister. I think now of the Atlantic Development Council and the Canadian Rural Development Council. Both these agencies have made constructive criticisms of the program, yet the minister has refused to make any policy statement on the recommendations that have been made. I believe that in light of this evidence the minister either has to respond by making a statement in this House or he has no alternative but to offer his resignation.

Mr. John Roberts (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) said three times in his speech that there was secrecy in this department. A little like the kink in "Alice", he seems to believe that because he says something three times it must be true. It was also notable that he offered not one single example in his speech of a situation where he was refused information or knowledge. In fact, this department is as forthcoming as any other in providing the information members want to receive about this program.

The hon. member indicated that over the past five years there have been the difficulties to which he referred regarding employment rates. He seems to belong to that

school of thought that believes in using magic as one approach to solving a problem. I would remind him that these problems have developed over the course of well over 100 years. Yet he seems to think that within the short space of the 2½ years during which this department has been operating it should be able to resolve the problems to which he refers.

The department is under no illusion that these objectives can be accomplished overnight. The deep-rooted problems of decades cannot be swept away in one or two years. The minister has emphasized over and over again that it will take at least 15 years before the programs which were put in place in 1969 will have brought the slow-growth regions to the point at which they are ready to take off into self-sustaining growth.

Consequently, criticisms of the department which assert that our programs have little or no impact on regional disparities are simply misdirected. Such criticisms accuse us of not having achieved in 2½ years—or, as the hon. member would have it, five years; this department has been in existence for only 2½ years—what we always said would take up to 15 years to accomplish. Moreover, by clamouring for dramatic results long before such results can reasonably be expected, the critics are doing a great disservice to regional policy in this country. They are tending to undermine programs which have barely had a chance to get properly off the ground. I would be delighted to receive from the hon. member some constructive suggestions about how to improve the programs of the department. In the various encounters that we have had on the "late show" I have not heard one constructive suggestion coming from the hon. member regarding how these programs can be improved.

Moreover, the available data do not support the contention that departmental programs are having no effect on regional disparities. In fact, there are already encouraging signs that our programs are beginning to bite even though these signs are necessarily tentative at this point of time. No matter what criterion one examines, whether it be investment, growth in manufacturing, employment, income differentials, the unemployment gap or labour force participation rates, there are unmistakable indications that the Atlantic region is in a healthier position at the beginning of the seventies than at any time in the post-war period. One would expect the hon. member to welcome this and try to give us an indication of how the programs can be improved. I hope that reasonably soon he will take the opportunity of doing just that.

Motion agreed to and the House adjourned at 10.28 p.m.