

*Government Organization Act, 1983*

Government will try to bring about a better co-ordination of federal efforts. That is fine.

I admit that the old system was far from perfect, but one of its advantages was that the Department of Regional Economic Expansion had the duty and the responsibility to carry out, on an on-going basis, analyses of regional economic needs and of existing opportunities, and kept in touch with the industrial boards, the provincial Governments, and in some cases the Federal Departments, but, most important, a Minister was responsible under the Act to deal specifically with these matters and to ensure that his Department would focus its attention on the needs of certain regions. This can continue with the reorganization under the Ministry of State for Economic Development. However, I have examined very closely the administrative organization of the new Ministry of State, and I doubt that it will have the necessary administrative resources in the provinces and here in Ottawa to ensure the same degree of attention by the Federal Government to the needs of those regions which, in some cases, have been slow to develop since Confederation. Although federal agencies will be more centralized, I doubt there will be the same focus on regional requirements in areas where it is not directly a federal concern and where it is not up to a single federal department to help when there is a need for every available government resource at the provincial, municipal and federal levels.

Mr. Speaker, I am from a riding that is affected by slow growth, a riding where we have always had chronic unemployment and where the economic situation is not only a historical reality but is also related to the region itself. It does have certain natural advantages, but there are also certain disadvantages because we are far from the major markets. We have no large urban centers, so there is practically no local market, and everything we produce has to be exported to the United States or Central Canada, Europe or Japan. As far as Europe and the United States are concerned, in some cases it is an advantage to be near the ocean, and we are, of course, only 100 miles from the U.S. border and the very rich Atlantic Seaboard market. However, as a member of Parliament representing such a region, I am concerned about the situation and I shall follow very closely the committee proceedings on this Bill when the officials will appear before it, or the Minister of what will now be called the Ministry of State for Economic Development, in order to determine whether this new Ministry, which I like to call a secretariat, will really have the administrative resources required to deal with what used to be the second part of the responsibilities of the Department of Regional Economic Expansion, in other words the promotion of regional development. We have never spent that much time discussing and defining the precise meaning of regional development.

I shall therefore follow closely committee proceedings. In summary, I support this Bill because, as I said earlier, there are some benefits in ensuring a better co-ordination among Federal Departments. It is also an advantage to merge the services of the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce

which provide assistance and analysis of industrial sectors with their counterparts in DREE. As I was saying, this will improve the services provided by this Department and make it more aware of industrial adjustments and regional needs. It will be a big improvement. As for the general matter of infrastructures, economic analysis and regional needs, and especially infrastructures such as roads in the case of my region, for instance, if we want to develop our tourism industry, it will be essential to get the municipal and provincial governments to agree on a comprehensive approach to regional development needs. That aspect of the Department of Regional Economic Expansion was most worthwhile and I repeat, Mr. Speaker, that there is a lot of concern about this issue. Several Members of the Atlantic Liberal caucus are concerned about this issue even though they generally support the changes because they will be beneficial.

● (1910)

[*English*]

We are going to look very carefully when this Bill is before the Committee. We are going to see the new MSERD as it would be called, under the jurisdiction of the Minister of State for Regional and Economic Development (Mr. Lumley), together with the new co-ordinators in the Provinces and the extent to which they will have the administrative capacity to carry out economic analyses and to get involved with the Provinces and municipalities in identifying opportunities and projects on a continuing basis. While there were things wrong with that aspect of DREE, I think in some cases that aspect of DREE had become—I hate to use the words—a little fat, and I believe a lot of federal officials along with provincial officials were acting as a government within a government. To some extent that is okay and it is advantageous. But I do not deny that there was a need to streamline and weed out what is going on in that part of the bureaucracy.

That aspect of reorganization is good. But the approach of the Government in the reorganization of development agencies reflects a difficulty we have in this country in dealing among Governments. The whole question of federal-provincial co-operation and federal-provincial relations concerns me very much. I am concerned with the way in which some provincial Governments carry out their relationships with the federal Government either substantively or politically. I am also concerned sometimes with the way in which the Government carries out its relations with the Provinces. I think we have to separate the politics and the substance. We have to be able to find ways, regardless of the political stripe of the federal Government, to carry out mechanisms of co-operation in regional development between the Provinces and the federal Government. The question of political credit, I believe, is important. I do not blame provincial Governments for the fact that the federal Government did not have credit for many programs. Sometimes provincial Governments were at fault. But on many, many occasions—and I have been here 15 years