

Decentralization

political level. Perhaps one of the reasons for that, and I am glad to see some ministers in the House—

Mr. Knowles: Two.

Mr. Lapointe: And two NDP.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton):—is that there has not been for some period of time a representation from the local government, nominees of the regional government of Ottawa-Carleton on one hand and the Outaouais government on the other, as members of the National Capital Commission. There could then be some meeting of minds and understanding on what is happening at the policy level, where these snowballs are made before they are thrown. It did not happen in this case. The snowball was made and it was thrown long before there was any real consultation as to what occurred. I hope the Minister of Public Works (Mr. Cosgrove) will take the debate on this bill as rather important in dealing with the relationships that must occur between the two levels of government.

I am not the only one who has been quarrelling about this and worrying about the way this government has proceeded. There are members in this House of Commons, and I respect their view, who feel that the decentralization program which was embarked upon by the Liberal government was a good thing. I want to make the record clear again. As a principle, decentralization is a solid principle. However, what happened here was that decentralization was taking place at the same time that a massive relocation was going on within the national capital area in terms of Hull.

It was the lack of consultation on the one hand and the fact that these things were running side by side which caused a tremendous number of problems. I am not the only one who has concerned himself with that. I have here a report to the voters of Ottawa West by the present Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons, the hon. member for Ottawa West (Mr. Francis). It is his "Report to Voters" No. 8, January 1977. You will recall from your geographical location in the electoral map, Mr. Speaker, this was a matter of some concern, even in your own area. This is what he said, and I quote from his report:

The Government of Canada, as an employer, has the right to decide where work in the Public Service is to be performed. If the government decides that the Fisheries Department is to be moved to the Atlantic or Pacific coast, then I think few people could object. If the government decides that a number of services such as the Mint have to be moved, as part of a philosophy of making government closer to the people in this vast land of ours, then I think most of us accept it. If the government decides that this policy is an essential instrument of national unity and making the federal presence felt through all the ten provinces and in the Northwest Territories and the Yukon, then I think the overwhelming number of voters in Ottawa West would accept it without question.

I think that if it were proven, they would accept it without question. The problem is that the propaganda has never been proven. That is beside the point. He goes on to say:

The problem arises, however, when the decision to decentralize is combined with a major relocation of government departments to Hull at the same time. The issue here relates to the timing of moves and measures taken to co-ordinate them in such a way that the impact on the residents of Ottawa will be the least serious possible.

What happened with respect to timing and co-ordination? There literally was not any. As a result, there was and still is a serious impact on the Ottawa side of the Ottawa River, this part of the national capital. If hon. members want visual confirmation of that, I invite them to join with the Minister of Public Works, who is in the chamber, and drive up Kent Street some morning on their way to the House of Commons. Look at the signs that are two or three storeys high about office space to lease. Talk to dentists, restaurateurs and others who occupy space in public buildings in anticipation that the relocation would not take place or, if it did, that some common sense would have been applied to it. That is a visual impact of it all.

● (1750)

Walk down Sparks Street, as I did today, and take a look at the number of vacant stores in what is regarded as the most prestigious shopping area in the national capital. Yet those stores, all of them providing service, some of them having been there for years, have decided to move elsewhere. There may be other reasons which combine, but I say to the Minister of Public Works—he cannot be blamed for it personally because he was not the minister of public works when these things occurred—that lack of planning and lack of foresight certainly had something to do with the vacancy of those stores, and prompts a real concern about the future of Sparks Street and the future of Bank Street.

I do not represent Sparks Street and I do not represent Bank Street, but in a commercial area, especially in that kind of small business commercial area, every pebble which is dropped into the pond of business welfare causes ripples which spread out and affect everyone else. I think bad planning has had a good deal of adverse effect in the national capital area and I intend to speak about some other aspects while the minister is in the House.

If members want further proof, let them talk to professional people—I am not thinking about members of the legal profession which draws people from all over; I am thinking of the dentists, the doctors and others who have tried to establish practices. All those people I have referred to, the restaurateurs and others, are small business people and they are the victims not of a move to Hull but of an ill-planned relocation to Hull, a relocation which took place at speeds which were unprecedented, unexpected and unheralded by anything which was said by the government which sits across the way.

That is what is happening to this area, and that is why I speak on this bill. When we became a government we took a look at the decentralization plan, particularly with respect to relocation. We considered it from the point of view of the ability to provide service, to provide a modicum of administrative efficiency to the operations of the government and service to the public generally. Generally speaking, we decided that some of these plans should go forward and that 19—I think that was the number—should be stopped. We were advised as a government that in no way could those we decided to stop—and some which we decided to allow to proceed because they were well advanced—could there be anything other than