

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, September 12, 1983

The House met at 11 a.m.

● (1105)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION ACT, 1983

MEASURE TO ESTABLISH

The House resumed from Wednesday, June 29, consideration of the motion of Mr. Trudeau that Bill C-152, an Act respecting the organization of the Government of Canada and matters related or incidental thereto, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates.

Hon. Michael Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Mr. Speaker, we are resuming debate today on a very important piece of legislation that has far-reaching consequences. It relates to the reorganization and the over-all philosophy of economic development policy for Canada. It is very important that this be done correctly because over 1.5 million people are out of work today.

We oppose this legislation. We do not expect to defeat it because the Government is asking us to legitimize something that has been in place for about a year and a half now. The Government had a Bill passed last June which provided for a principal program for the new Department, even before the Department was approved by the House of Commons; which displayed the arrogance of this Government and its disdain for the institution of Parliament. It also indicated the approach the Government wants to take to economic development. It is ignoring the desires and views of Members on both sides of the House in what should be a non-partisan effort. The procedure is a bad precedent because it is asking us to enact something already in place. As well it removes the opportunity for the public and Members of Parliament to have any meaningful influence on legislation.

While we do not expect to defeat this Bill, we do oppose it. I am disappointed the Minister is not even in the House today to hear comments of Members on this side of the House. We are opposing this legislation in order to bring to the Minister's attention some of the legitimate concerns that Canadians and that we on their behalf have. We want to address them to him so he can administer this Department effectively and deal with the important problem of unemployment.

I will be speaking only of the regional economic development, the DRIE aspect. The Hon. Member for York-Peel (Mr. Stevens) will be addressing those elements that relate to external affairs later on in this debate.

There are three main objections I want to address today. First, the Government is making far-reaching structural changes in government for short-term political purposes. Second, the Government is merging two Departments which have quite different operational objectives and looking into the future will be very difficult to operate. Third, there will be a lack of cohesion and direction in the economic policy of the Government.

Let me be more specific. Beginning two years ago the Government stated publicly and has demonstrated on many occasions its concern that it was not getting the proper political profile for certain of its programs. The federal Government is more concerned about this political profile than the actual impact of the programs under its administration and its public image is far more important than the effect these programs will have on the unemployed and on economic development.

By decentralizing the program in this new Department, the Government will be increasing the grant-making mechanism. This has important ramifications in that the over-all grant-making mechanism will be put under much more political and arbitrary control. This will help the Government in ridings it is concerned about, and there are many of them. This Bill will result in a political boondoggle. There will be more grants. There will be a huge grant budget which will be controlled under one group, the new Department of Regional Industrial Expansion. Undoubtedly, there will be a large increase in the arbitrary decisions on grants that will be based on overwhelmingly blatant political considerations. It is no coincidence that we have an election coming up some time within the next twelve months. We can expect more Liberals running around the country cutting ribbons and handing out cheques than ever before.

An Hon. Member: You are jealous.

Mr. Wilson: I am not jealous at all, Mr. Speaker. The Hon. Member opposite says I am jealous. I want to tell you something about one grant. I hope you will take this into consideration the next time you throw a flip comment like that across the floor.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I am sure the Hon. Member realizes that he must address his remarks to the Chair.

Mr. Wilson: I will bring my remarks directly to your attention, Mr. Speaker. In one day the Hon. Member for