

Regional Development Incentives Act

disparities exist, the regulations and legislation administered by most departments, and which are made at a national level, can hardly be applied, or if they are it is not in the interest of the local population. So why could the Department of Regional Economic Expansion not serve as some kind of bridge for national legislation in order to correct these inequalities? For example, in the field of transportation, every user of an airport must pay the rental cost of the space used, but how can an airline do this in areas like the Gaspé peninsula, the lower north shore in northeast New Brunswick where passenger traffic is certainly not as heavy as in Montreal, Quebec City, Toronto or Winnipeg? How can the users absorb in their costs that price difference? Now why should the Department of Regional Economic Expansion not be used specifically to bridge that gap?

That, Mr. Speaker, is a real problem of regional disparity and the department should indeed be used to help solve it. Knowing that the minister is broadminded and that he would like to alleviate regional disparities, I am sure he will find out how he could act in co-operation with other departments to make up those deficits. Mr. Speaker, I conclude by saying that this bill is very important. I hope the three parties in the House will pass it as quickly as possible so that we can maintain that five-year period to enable industrialists in remote places to take advantage of the legislation in all fairness and obtain as much as possible for the economic development of our regions.

[English]

Mr. Pat Nowlan (Annapolis Valley-Hants): Mr. Speaker, I am very glad to have the opportunity to speak on Bill C-35. While all hon. members who have spoken on the bill so far have a disposition to move it along, that should not detract from the fundamental importance of the bill. It gives me some concern that it is being debated on a quiet Friday afternoon just before the long St. Jean Baptiste weekend when many members are absent, some of whom may have different thoughts about DREE. Questions have been raised in this House about DREE grants to industries in certain parts of the country. This is, therefore, a subject which deserves a very full and substantive debate, and in the circumstances that may not take place this afternoon.

It would appear that the treasury benches are contemplating a new bill and when that is presented it might present the best opportunity to discuss these measures.

I must say that I share the concern of several hon. members, including the hon. member for Central Nova (Mr. MacKay), the very distinguished former minister of this department, and also the member of the NDP who spoke earlier today. Both members questioned the five-year extension clause. We all know that syndrome—indeed, it might be called “parliamentary constipation”. The Bank Act, for instance, is extended every five years or every ten years. We never review it; we just give it another year’s boost.

I do not know how many members appreciate the fact that while DREE was created in 1969 the act has, in effect, already been extended for a five-year period. I think if the proposed extension were for two or three years, we would be forced to come to grips with some of the fundamental principles involved in the whole policy of DREE. As I said earlier, those principles are so fundamental to helping the regions of this country and/or giving balance to the central portion of the country—which feels a little threatened at times in view of the economic changes taking place in the world and in Canada—that this shorter intention would give members a chance to debate the philosophy behind DREE.

I think you were in the House, Mr. Speaker, when the first minister of DREE, Mr. Marchand, said—or perhaps it was said in the Speech from the Throne in 1969—that this was a bold new adventure. The actual quotation is “—a bold new instrument for combating regional disparities in Canada.”

A strong effort has certainly been made in this direction and people in the department have sincerely tried to implement this policy. DREE is better than some departments in that its very composition is more decentralized than others that seem to “grow like Topsy” in Ottawa or in the central area of the country. In that sense DREE has a good history of trying to decentralize its staff, its officials and its operation to the areas most directly affected by its policy. That is a very positive matter.

Before I get into the substance of the bill, Mr. Speaker, I should perhaps first devote a short sentence or two—which might be highly provocative if certain members were in the House—to paying my respects to and congratulating the former minister, the hon. member for Central Nova, and the present minister, the hon. member for Matapédia-Matane (Mr. De Bané). In private discussions with the minister, both before and after his appointment, he indicated that he wants to carry on the good work started by the hon. member for Central Nova.

● (1450)

In particular, I single out those two members. I suppose I could have singled out others, but I single out those two because they were directly involved with the most recent announcement of substance from DREE. This involved the extension and grant to enable Michelin to set up a large operation and develop it in Nova Scotia. This plant just happens to be in my riding. It will have an immense and substantive effect on the economy of Atlantic Canada, Nova Scotia and particularly the Annapolis Valley. Therefore, for what it is worth—of course, words are free so perhaps they are not worth that much—I want to extend publicly my thanks to the ministers responsible for DREE, together with their provincial counterparts, for bringing to a conclusion an agreement which involved many sensitive cross currents in view of the many problems which this country faces.

Having said that, I would like to comment on the substance of the bill and talk about the whole question of regional disparity. I am not trying to diminish the philosophy which