

Adjournment Debate

therefore like the Parliamentary Secretary to show more ability than his Minister and to give us a clear, explicit and specific answer. Does the Government still intend to move the Cartographic Institute to Sherbrooke, as agreed with the unions? This means an institute of about 400 employees and not a skeleton staff. Will the Government not agree to the recommendations made by three Progressive Conservative Members of the region who do not want the institute to move? Is the political will expressed during the electoral campaign still there?

Mr. Speaker, I know that the Eastern Townships need this institute. You know as well as I do how high is the unemployment rate in the region. You know as well as I do how great are the expectations of the people at Sherbrooke University. What I want to know is quite simple. Actually, this should not require three minutes from the Parliamentary Secretary's time if he is in a position to tell me tonight that indeed the Institute of Cartography will be moved, that a specific timeframe will be followed and we will not have to wait until the pigs start to fly and that, Mr. Speaker, you have no intention of making an election on that issue! There have already been three, in my view, so said your leader! He even went as far as five, but we know his natural propensity to exaggerate!

Mr. Speaker, I think this is important for the people in the area who are now getting involved. You will certainly be visited by the Mayor of Sherbrooke, accompanied by people from the economic summit who led an absolutely extraordinary fight on the Domtar issue. There was tremendous regional solidarity on that. In that sense, Mr. Speaker, I know you are aware of the regional solidarity that exists in the Eastern Townships and that, like myself, you will want to make sure the Parliamentary Secretary will not disappoint anyone. You will want to make sure the Parliamentary Secretary is equal to his enormous task, that he gives us a forthright, direct, and specific answer. I know that when he was in Opposition, he was a champion of clarity. This is the kind of clarity I am expecting from him tonight, Mr. Speaker, and despite his interests in forestry, I am sure his interest in regional economic development is still greater and he can tell us tonight what is the definite and specific intent of the Government.

I think the Government has procrastinated beyond reason. If it is credit the new Government is looking for, we will be ready to applaud as soon as the work starts. But, for heaven's sake let it start! Because this has been a specific commitment by the Prime Minister, by the candidates in the election, and it is the kind of commitment we want to see implemented within the shortest possible time, because the area is in tremendous need of it.

● (1825)

[English]

Mr. F. Oberle (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of State (Mines)): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the

Hon. Member's question. He is championing a cause for a region which is similar to the region I represent in another part of the country, and I am most sensitive to the needs of that region. In fact, the Hon. Member will recall that I have in the past made many efforts in many different directions to sensitize the Government to the special needs of regions such as Sherbrooke.

The Hon. Member correctly analysed the situation. It was in 1977 that the Government of the day for the first time announced that there would be a program of decentralization of certain Government Departments to different parts of Canada. Soon thereafter the proposition was advanced that a part of the programs maintained by the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources should be relocated to Sherbrooke. The commitment became a very seasonal kind of thing, as happened to many of these things in the past. As elections came near, the commitment became stronger, soon to be forgotten after the election. In fact, when the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) spoke about this subject during the election campaign he was not, of course, aware of how much planning had gone into this proposition and whether or not an impact statement had been prepared on both the region which was to benefit from this project and, of course, the Department.

I can tell the Hon. Member that the proposition which has been advanced, namely, to relocate the mapping and surveys branch or the Cartography Institute of the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources to Sherbrooke involves about 400 positions. There is some planning which has gone on in the intervening period. There have been discussions with unions. It has been decided that only about one hundred of the existing positions would move from Ottawa to Sherbrooke. The rest would be recruited there.

The Prime Minister and the Government, of course, immediately sensed the urgency associated with this matter, and the need and potential of that region to absorb that kind of facility. Unfortunately, however, the planning had not been done, but will be done. The plan needs to demonstrate maximum utilization and benefit to the region and, of course, minimum disruption to the existing program. We want to get the best out of this project.

The Hon. Member has been waiting for eight years. I know how often he spoke when he was in the Government—likely behind the scenes because I never heard him in the House. He will just have to be a little more patient. I can tell him that the program will have to fit in within the new fiscal framework of the Government and must be co-ordinated with a set of other priorities. There is no intention, however, of doing anything other than to perhaps postpone, hopefully for a shorter period of time than eight years, this important project.