

Regional Development Incentives Act

amount of work for department officials. The improvements proposed in the bill entail a lot of work and we shall have to increase the personnel. The decisions will get increasingly more complex and important. That is why I suggest the creation of a board comprising senior officials of my department, representatives of the Department of Finance and the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce, as well as specialists from the private sector. Thus we shall be able to see to it that this most important program give the best possible results.

When we initiated the present program less than 18 months ago, many people were skeptical, and rightly so, about the chances this unprecedented measure had to succeed.

We had to learn from experience and that explains why we made mistakes. Yet I believe the program indubitably meets the present needs and produces excellent results. The amendments I propose have no other purpose than make it more efficient.

[English]

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the minister's introduction to what we consider to be a most important bill, but he did not tell us very much. We had already read the press release from the minister explaining the proposed amendments to the bill. For what little enlightenment we gained, he could have dispensed with the speech which he made today.

Mr. Bell: Hear, hear!

Mr. Béchard: They are never satisfied.

Mr. McGrath: We have considered this to be a most important bill for a number of reasons. First of all, it is the first time that this act has been opened by Parliament since originally passed. The act has now been in operation for a full year, so we will want to examine it from that viewpoint. Secondly, Mr. Speaker, we are naturally very interested in examining the full intent of the amendments proposed by the government. I might say that we on this side of the House do not agree with the government's concept of regional expansion embodied in this bill. We will enlarge on this during the course of the debate and during the clause by clause examination in committee.

The bill is a relatively simple one, but the principle is very important and complex and it is on this principle that we want to examine the government very closely and carefully. The mechanics of the amendments can be dispensed with very quickly. Mr. Speaker, we want to question the minister's estimate of the number of jobs that have been created. I am very anxious to get into that and anxious to analyze the figure of 48,000 jobs. I should like to know how the government arrived at that figure.

● (4:00 p.m.)

What I consider the most startling failure of the government's regional development policy is its inability to

[Mr. Marchand.]

come to grips with the fundamental problems of regional disparity in this country. After all, this is what the bill is supposed to do, together with legislation setting up the minister's department. This fundamental problem of development, sir, involves the question of ways in which the federal government contributes to the fulfilment of a given region's potential, in order that the citizens of that region can enjoy a standard and quality of life which meets an acceptable level.

In my view, Sir, this goal can only be accomplished if the first premise of any development strategy for Canada is based on the fact that Canada is comprised of five different economic regions, five regions with different potentials and different economic aspirations. It is only by approaching regional development from the standpoint of this premise that we can hope to meet with any degree of success. A strong national economic policy dedicated to full employment can only be successful if the economic realities of Canada dictate the development policy followed by the government. This regional concept of our economy is an economic fact of life in Canada, and one which this government will sooner or later have to recognize.

A strong national economic policy means a prosperous economy for Ontario and it means prosperity for the other industrial regions of Canada. A strong and prosperous Ontario or a strong and prosperous Quebec mean that the federal government and the national economy are better equipped to assist the disadvantaged regions of the country. Increased assistance to the disadvantaged areas of Canada is only possible if full employment is a national policy for all Canada. It therefore follows, Sir, that a strong national economy and our ability to assist the disadvantaged areas within Canada amount, of course, to the same thing. We believe, Mr. Speaker, that the co-ordination of development with stability means prosperity for all the regions of Canada. We believe that this approach must, of necessity, dictate the government's attitude towards regional development.

There are many aspects of the bill before the House, which embodies the main thrust of the government's regional development policy or the government's program for dealing with regional disparities in this country, that we shall want to examine. We shall want to examine the bill carefully in committee and hear expert witnesses who will be able to enlighten us about the proper approach that we ought to take in this country in order to achieve a meaningful regional development policy. Above all, the government must set for itself guidelines in order to meet the demands of regional development and to end regional disparities in this country.

We feel that the first guideline must be the recognition that the provinces, municipalities and regional agencies involved in any regional development plan know what is best for them. We believe that the regions of the country are in the best position to tell the government exactly what form of development is best suited to that particular regional economy. I say that, notwithstanding the fact that the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Marchand) has built up a virtual army of experts,