

*Government Organization*

But I think we really fool ourselves if we believe that regional development can be fully and completely equated with what passes for industrial development. Industrial development is one aspect of the foundation, if you like, for many other things that must happen. I hope the minister will indicate how he visualizes other questions related to the economic and social aspects of development being handled by this department.

In the few minutes I have remaining I would like to make two or three specific points with regard to this legislation. One of the basic weaknesses to be found in the bill is the effective gutting of the Atlantic Development Board. The government seems to have had a highly ambivalent feeling all the way through the piece about the Atlantic Development Board. In 1963 the government suggested it was not satisfied with what the previous government did in 1962. The government wanted more than just an advisory agency; it wanted one that had some real powers of initiation and administration. Therefore amendments were introduced in 1963. There was always a fair amount of pull and tug between what the Atlantic Development Board was set up to do and what it actually did in terms of the kind of control that Treasury Board exercised over it. But at least there was an attempt to deal with problems of the Atlantic region in a somewhat rational way through this agency.

Now we are told, in 1969, that the idea put forward in 1963 was not really such a good one. It is said that what we had before was not really better, that although it may have been said to be better, this really has not been the case. The change being made now is a variation of that theme. We are told we are to have an advisory council. The advisory council will have very little opportunity to function except as the minister desires. From a reading of the provisions in the legislation one would expect it will not function on a very active or high level. I think this is most unfortunate.

It seems to me that the federal government must establish some kind of intermediary agency through which it can meet the provinces. I feel that the Atlantic Development Board was that kind of agency. It was not perfect, obviously, but if changes had been made to give it sufficient credibility in the Atlantic region it could have become a tool functioning effectively for regional development in the Atlantic area.

[Mr. MacDonald (Egmont).]

What we have in this legislation is a face-saving device for a government that is reluctant to go whole hog with regard to this program. The government says: We really do not need it, but we are not wiping it completely off the books. We are not really changing things very much. We have given the new council some of the administrative and executive functions of the A.D.B. We have also given it much larger powers to look at the whole field and comment on all the other programs and agencies under the new department.

The government is in fact trying to console people on that basis. I hope no one is fooled into being consoled on that basis, because it is not true. The minister knows it is not true. If he really believed that the Atlantic Development Council would be so important to his work and that of his department, if he thought it would be of some significance, I am sure that in the legislation provision would have been made for other councils, particularly for an area close to the minister's own concern, the area east of Trois-Rivières within the boundary of Quebec. One could name other parts of Canada that should probably come within the responsibility of this department and with regard to which there is no provision in the bill. I was interested to hear the hon. member for Gatineau make somewhat similar comments.

If the Atlantic Development Council means anything, surely that concept should not be lost sight of in dealing with other areas in need of regional development for which the new department will have responsibility. I hope, and perhaps the minister will deal with this matter in his remarks later, we will be given a definite assurance that the kind of studies being worked on by the Atlantic Development Board and which are just about to see the light of day will be continued. It will be nothing short of farcical to set up new studies when we have already had a team of people working on studies for some years.

It would seem to me that if there is a genuine desire to attack the long-term problems of economic disparity in the Atlantic region a plan will have to be developed in the next few years which has the consent of the provinces of eastern Canada and in which there can be co-operation and co-ordination between the federal and provincial governments. Only in this way can the federal government and the provinces work together to alleviate what are very long-term problems.