

AFTER RECESS

The house resumed at 8 p.m.

NATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BOARD

PROVISION FOR DEFINITION OF DUTIES,
APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS, ETC.

The house resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Martineau, for the Minister of Finance) for the second reading of Bill No. C-87, to provide for the establishment of a national economic development board.

Mr. Gordon: Mr. Speaker, at five o'clock I was speaking on this bill which is to create an economic development board. I understand that during the dinner recess the Minister of Public Works has announced his intention of leaving the government in order to contest the leadership of the Conservative party in British Columbia.

Mr. Graffley: What has that to do with the bill?

Mr. Habel: We would like to wish him well.

Mr. Gordon: I think it is fair to say that the Minister of Public Works is one of the best liked and most respected members of the government—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Gordon:—and one of the ablest members. It would be interesting to know whether the minister was influenced in his decision either by his abhorrence of this bill, which favours some measure of economic planning that offends the minister's Conservative principles and upbringing, or by his unhappiness at a continuance of an alliance, anywhere in Canada, between the Conservative party and the Social Credit party. I cannot wish the minister success in his future political endeavour, but—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I should caution the hon. member that his time is rapidly running out and perhaps he would spend it more usefully dealing with second reading of the bill under consideration.

Mr. Pickersgill: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, you forget that the hon. member is replying to the second reading of the bill on behalf of our party, and has unlimited time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The point as to relevancy still applies, but the hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate is perfectly correct in saying that the hon. member has unlimited time. I had forgotten that he was speaking on behalf of his party and I apologize to him for that. He does have unlimited time.

National Economic Development Board

Mr. Gordon: All I wanted to say was that I think all of us admire the minister's courage and that we wish him happiness, if not complete political success, in his new venture, and perhaps a less frustrating experience than he may have had during the last few months.

At five o'clock I had almost completed an outline of what we on this side of the house think the functions of a national economic council should be. I had listed a number of points and I should now like to mention the last and concluding point, which is point No. 6. A lot has been said recently about the need for labour and management to understand each other better and to work together more harmoniously in Canada, perhaps in ways that have been developing with some success in Europe. This would be one of the main purposes of the kind of economic council that we envisage.

I mentioned that the kind of economic council we have in mind should make periodic reports to the public on short and long term economic trends. The bill before us does provide for the proposed national economic development board making an annual report to parliament, including the financial statements of the board and the Auditor General's report thereon, but that sort of report is required of all boards, commissions and other agencies of government and is quite different from the kind of reports I had in mind.

Hon. members will recall that over a period of several years the staffs of the departments of trade and commerce and finance held quarterly conferences with economists and other qualified representatives of business, labour, farm groups and fishing interests. These conferences were usually attended by the ministers of finance, trade and commerce, and labour, and by the deputy ministers and other interested officials. They proved of great value to the participants, including the ministers and other government representatives who attended.

Through these conferences government officials met and exchanged views with those on the outside, if I might refer to them in that way, who are engaged in the day to day activities that make the Canadian economy tick. At the same time the representatives of business, labour, farm and fishery organizations, and so on, had an opportunity of expressing their views to the government, in an informal atmosphere, about what was happening in various industries and various sectors of the economy. These meetings were discontinued, I believe in 1959, possibly because the government found it inconvenient to discuss or to be cross-questioned about