

*Government Organization*

We have tried to assist the minister in making sure that he can carry out his duties successfully. Although we support these measures, we must be realistic. We have entrusted the minister with a great deal of responsibility. That responsibility is greater than other ministers bear. If we are to be responsible members of the house we must, in our turn, examine on a regular basis the minister's stewardship. If the house has no assurance that it will examine on a regular basis the way the minister has discharged his duties it will have failed in its responsibility of ensuring that the department achieves the objectives which have been set out. For that reason, I propose to move an amendment to clause 40. I hope the minister will accept it. If he does not, perhaps he may move a similar amendment of his own. I think the minister and his officials would be on weak ground if they refuse to set up any adequate or necessary machinery which would examine how the minister has discharged his powers under this legislation. I, therefore, move to have the following words added to the end of clause 40:

Such report shall then be immediately referred to Standing Committee of the House of Commons on Economic Growth and Regional Disparity which shall be constituted as soon as possible after the commencement of the first session of each parliament, in any event not more than 20 days after the commencement of the said session, and presided over by a member of the opposition.

Three things are significant about this amendment. First, it refers specifically to a committee that is to be established regularly under the standing orders of the House of Commons. It will discharge certain responsibilities that are related to this department. The present committee most closely approximating the proposed committee is called the Committee on Regional Development. I think the minister will agree that that designation is much too vague. Clearly the minister thought it vague because the new department is to be called the Department of Regional Economic Expansion. The proposed committee would examine matters related to economic growth, which is of paramount importance to the whole country, and questions concerning regional disparity. It is important to have such activity clearly spelled out in the designation of the committee. If the minister, his staff or the people of the country consider the department the only agency responsible for lifting up regions across the country and enabling them to join the main stream of economic viability, then of course

the department and its programs will flounder. On the other hand, if it is clear that the continued economic health of the nation depends on a realistic attack on the problems of areas suffering from regional economic disparity it will also be clear that the proposed committee will have some responsibility in dealing with this problem.

● (10:00 p.m.)

Therefore, I think it is important that the committee be designated as a committee on economic growth and regional disparity. Second, I think it is important that this committee, by statute, be charged to meet on a regular basis. We do not foresee any problem at the present time with this minister, but one never knows the developments which will occur in years hence. It may be the government, for reasons of its own, may not want the committee to meet. This would militate against the proper responsibilities, interests and privileges enjoyed by members of this house.

This amendment suggests quite specifically that the committee shall meet as soon as possible after the commencement of the first session of each parliament or at least no later than 20 days after the commencement of the said session. That is important if we are to be ensured parliament is going to live up to its responsibilities in entrusting these powers to the minister.

Third, I suggest this committee be presided over by a member of the opposition to give it the kind of impartiality and credibility that is important for major committees of this kind. I hear a member to my far right "phoo-fawing" that idea. I do not think he is serious because I am sure he realizes how important it is for committees such as Public Accounts to be chaired by a member of the opposition in order to have a full, free, frank inquiry into the circumstances that relate to its own area of jurisdiction. It would be important, not only for members of this house but for the general public whom we seek to serve as well as to a degree the provinces that will not from time to time share all the views of the minister, to know that full and open discussions are being held on a regular basis of all activities related to the particular responsibilities exercised by the minister. If the minister suggests this is not an acceptable amendment, he is then denying to this house the kind of responsibility it should exercise, while freely accepting a number of responsibilities being entrusted to him under this legislation.