

*Government Organization*

[*Translation*]

The hon. member was anxious lest we should threaten the freedom or the autonomy of the provinces, but that is precisely what he is doing by supporting the amendment of the opposition.

As for me, I want us to be able to discuss with each and every province, to try and find the best way of co-operating. If a new council has to be set up, after we had experienced it for some time, here in the house maybe we would agree, to give it a legal status or to indicate in the law which councils should be set up so as to achieve the purposes of the law.

**Mr. Fortin:** Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the comments of the hon. minister and all the trouble he took to express his views. I think it is already something to be thankful for when ministers take the trouble of explaining the situation to us.

However, we are afraid that the proposed amendment will not achieve very much. In any case the Conservatives have never achieved much in the past, and I do not think that their amendment will work marvels either.

It is persistently being said that this legislation is a minor one, but the fact remains that we want the best possible guarantee that there will not be any overlapping of jurisdictions between the provinces and the federal government with respect to regional development, for this legislation does not seem to be too promising if both sides start being stubborn once again, as the minister said last week.

Actually, if the federal government were to act one way and the provinces another and then a council is established and an agreement is reached, or if the federal government were to establish a council and the provinces were to establish another one in turn, with discussions taking place for three days and then each side going its own way, I think the minister himself would be the first to be disappointed, because he would not have attained his goal.

All we wish, Mr. Chairman, and I remind the minister of it—is to get the best possible guarantee that the needs of Canadians will be taken care of and that regional development will not be just empty words, but a reality.

[*English*]

**Mr. MacDonald (Egmont):** Mr. Chairman, if one were trying to sum up the first and second messages of the minister with regard

to this clause one could do so in three words, "Ottawa knows best." The impact of such a statement must be felt in areas that have greatly suffered at the hands of the federal government which in times past has devised policies in direct contradiction to the condition of those areas. It is queer that on the one hand the minister should say that this is being put in the legislation because in the past we had the Atlantic Development Board, which contributed something. Now, we are going to have less than we had before, and on the other hand, the minister justifies this by saying we are going to have a whole department charged with this responsibility.

However, there is something dangerous behind the argument that Ottawa knows best. Somebody suggests, "Uncle Ottawa knows best." That is not the kind of uncle with whom I would want to be associated. I find it really incredible that the minister and the government would urge this idea in view of the recent conference in the Confederation Room in the West Block, at which one of the main issues discussed was the need for some kind of meaningful consultation and co-operation with the provinces. If there were certain weaknesses in the Atlantic Development Board it may have been that it was not an agency which formed a bridge between what the provinces were devising and the initiatives that were open to the federal government. But now that bridge is being eliminated to the point where it will carry no meaningful traffic.

It is also passing queer that the minister would want to engage in the kind of discussion he has had with the hon. member for Lotbinière. I know that they are both from the same province, and perhaps they are working the same side of the street. I am surprised that the minister has not received a number of communications from the provinces resenting the fact that nothing but a council will be established under the terms of this legislation.

**Mr. Marchand (Langelier):** You are surprised?

**Mr. MacDonald (Egmont):** Yes, I am. Our communications system cannot be as good as it should be, because it strikes me that a number of the provinces should be disturbed about the fact that once the Atlantic Development Board goes there will be a transfer of decision making to Ottawa, away from the Atlantic region. There will be an elimination of a similar kind of participation for other areas very much in need of participating