

Regional Development Incentives Act

• (5:20 p.m.)

Mr. Nystrom: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps, when I have finished, the Parliamentary Secretary (Mr. O'Connell) will have a few more questions to which he can reply. The hon. gentleman did say a while ago in this House that there was no correspondence. I am flabbergasted that there should be no correspondence at all between the premier of Saskatchewan and the federal government with regard to federally-designated areas. Did the premier not write even a single letter on this important subject? He has expressed his views about it freely in the Saskatchewan legislature, in the press and over the other media. Did he not write even a brief note mentioning the areas which he believed should be included under the regional development incentive program? Mr. Speaker, I did not ever have very much confidence in the premier of Saskatchewan, but after learning something like this, if the Parliamentary Secretary is telling us the truth, I have even less confidence in him. It seems to me that any premier would be interested enough at least to write to the minister in charge and make known to him the areas which he believes should be included as designated areas in his own province. This is especially important in the case of a province such as Saskatchewan, having regard to developments there during the last two or three years. I do not think the people of our province should forgive the premier if he did not even send a few letters to the minister in charge or to the department.

If there is no correspondence at all, it becomes very difficult to debate this point further. But I think there must be some. All of us will have to demand a good explanation from the Parliamentary Secretary when he rises to take part in the debate. I do not intend to become involved in a long series of suggestions to indicate what ought to be done, in my opinion, or to prove that the government is not doing what I think. The Parliamentary Secretary heard me speak for seven minutes during the late show last Monday night and is familiar with some of my ideas as to what should be done in this area. What is really important in this particular debate is that the government should produce the relevant papers if they exist. I am sure some do exist. I am sure some correspondence must exist. If the Parliamentary Secretary says that it does not, I think the premier of Saskatchewan would be interested to know that.

The Federal government is led by a man who a year and a half ago talked of the new politics of participatory democracy, of opening up government and society for all to participate. Yet when we ask about something as basic as this, it is denied us. The people in my province have the right to know what kind of letters, briefs and communications were exchanged between the two governments before this government made up its mind which areas to include within the regional development incentives program. This is a matter that is basic to parliamentary democracy and to a society that pretends to believe in participatory democracy.

All members from Saskatchewan are very happy at the inclusion of Regina and Saskatoon and the Meadow Lake area in the new plan announced yesterday. I think all of us would be very happy to see the government do something to improve life in these areas. As you know, Mr. Speaker, I and other hon. members have for some time called upon the government to designate all of Saskatchewan a special area which would qualify for government grants under the regional program.

Mr. Stewart (Cochrane): Why not include all of Canada?

Mr. Nystrom: I hear the hon. member for Cochrane (Mr. Stewart) making his usual contribution to the debate, and I shall be interested to hear later what he has to say.

As the hon. member for Regina East (Mr. Burton) outlined today, and as I have said on previous occasions, all of the people of Saskatchewan, farmers and others, are affected by the economic recession that has set in. Farm income has fallen drastically; there is no quarrel about that. Non-farm income has gone down. Unemployment is higher now in Saskatchewan than it has been for years. Businesses are closing up; many have gone bankrupt, others are slowing down. Unless some help arrives soon, others will have to pull out. In addition to that, investment has fallen and people are moving out of the province. About 1,800 people moved out of Saskatchewan each month between last April and last October. This alone gives a very good illustration of what is happening in Saskatchewan.

After the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Marchand) made his announcement in the House yesterday, I telephoned the mayor of Yorkton. He asked me why Yorkton was left out of the regional