

Government Organization

amount of concern with which they were treated by the Atlantic Development Board.

That is my main worry. There are other areas as well which perhaps have pressing problems, but certainly no more important than those which exist on Bell Island. The minister knows this. He knows the matter has been mentioned before on a number of occasions. As I have already stated the matter has been studied by the committee. I hope before this session ends, the minister will give us an assurance that these urgent problems will continue to receive consideration during the interim period while the new department is being set up.

Mr. Marchand (Langelier): I think I can give that assurance to the hon. member for St. John's East right away. We have already in the department all the recommendations of the Atlantic Development Board. That does not mean we will necessarily agree to them all. However, this is not new. In the past they had to be approved by treasury board and the department. We will consider all of them, however, and there will be no delay between the passing of this bill and the disappearance of the old Atlantic Development Board.

We will have more power under this bill than the Atlantic Development Board had or even the department had, because we can spend on the infra-structure after agreement with the province. We will take into consideration immediately all the plans that were in existence and with which the Atlantic Development Board was dealing. So, I can give the assurance to the hon. gentleman that we do not intend to wait until an agreement is signed before dealing with the problem that has been transmitted by the board.

Now, the hon. member for Egmont said the law provides that this council will sit only two times a year. Under the old law it was provided that the Atlantic Development Board must sit at least once. The fact that the new council must sit at least twice does not mean that it must sit only twice. It has to sit at least two times, but it can sit more than that. It may sit twice a month or as many times as it desires.

I am sure the council will sit much more often than two times. The hon. Leader of the Opposition mentioned that a mistake was made in 1963. I do not know whether it was a mistake. I was not a part of that decision and therefore would not attempt to make an assessment in respect of the responsibility for that decision. Knowing what I know now, I do not believe it was necessarily a mistake

[Mr. McGrath.]

because at that time there was no department with responsibility for economic expansion. No department was responsible for regional development. We are creating a new set-up and it is quite normal that we revise the old structures which were in existence.

● (9:00 p.m.)

Maybe the government was justified in doing it that way at that time. I will not make a fight on that. I am not ready, either, to say that what we are doing now will be good forever; that it is the eternal truth and that we will never need to change it. It may be that in a few years we will agree to change what we are doing today if it does not work out the way we think it should.

[Translation]

Mr. Chairman, I am rather surprised at the stand taken by the hon. member for Lotbinière (Mr. Fortin) because the amendment is quite the opposite of what he wishes.

If you read the amendment carefully, you see that the federal government must—I only have here the English version—"that the minister shall"—in consultation with the provinces and so on, establish or set up a council. This is an infringement upon the freedom of the provinces which are not mentioned in the legislation.

What we are saying under the legislation to the province of Quebec or the province of Manitoba or Saskatchewan, is this: you have to accept a council. This is precisely because we respect that freedom, that provincial autonomy that we do not want to do what was done with the Atlantic Council. In that case it is a fact, it has been accepted and we can put it in the statutes. But for the other provinces, it is precisely the opposite that would happen, if the amendment were passed.

We want to remain perfectly free to negotiate with the provinces.

For instance the province of Quebec can consider the matter, then state that it is not interested in a council similar to that of the Atlantic areas. If we accepted the amendment, then we would have to tell the Quebec authorities: this is the council, and the law says that you have to accept it as it is. Besides, the council should be similar as provided in the legislation, and I quote:

[English]

It must establish similar development councils for other regions.