

*Regional Development Incentives Act*

Not too long ago a motion was debated which dealt with the development of marine resources. I spoke on it as did others. The motion was presented by the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East (Mr. Forrestall). This idea has great potential for helping the development of the Atlantic provinces. There is no reason for us to admit that the only resource we can obtain from the seas around the Atlantic provinces is fish because now we are doing some drilling for oil and gas. Therefore, the department should promote research and exploration of these avenues to make these provinces viable. It is not sufficient for the department to simply say they want to lend some money to industry and thus provide employment. It has to look at what the other departments are doing, assess the situation, and advise other departments what they should do in the different regions in Canada.

There is a specific reason for naming this department the Department of Regional Economic Expansion. It should assess the situation in the various regions and decide what should be done for them, as well as suggest to other departments of the government what projects should be undertaken in order to help these regions to develop. The Department of Regional Economic Expansion is not just a lending agency to manufacturing industry. To my mind, it should have sufficient expertise to assess the situation in various regions and work out appropriate programs for them.

Let us consider, for example, the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce which is responsible for industry and for all commercial activities in Canada. What has it done for shipbuilding? Of course, the minister will say that he provided some subsidies for shipbuilding. Why is the Department of Regional Economic Expansion not saying that in the Atlantic provinces and on the west coast we should build ships and establish an effective Canadian merchant marine to operate in our coastal waters? This would provide employment and is what I would like the department to do.

The Department of Regional Economic Expansion should also advise the Department of Transport with regard to the provision of proper transportation facilities in certain areas which lack them, because transportation is probably the most important single factor in the development of our regions. The Department of Regional Economic Expansion should be able to tell the Department of Transport that proper transportation facilities at competitive rates are absolutely necessary if a region is to be helped.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Comeau:** I am sorry to be referring continuously to the Atlantic area but that is the area I know best. At one time we had the Atlantic Development Board. Although it did not do marvels, after this department was established it should have taken advantage of the expertise which the board had developed over a period of time. The Atlantic Development Board did not have the answers to all questions, but the Department of Regional Economic Expansion should have provided some policies to replace those of the board which was designed to help those provinces.

[Mr. Comeau.]

Some regions used to be able to obtain grants for such projects as highway construction, sewerage, and so on. The Department of Regional Economic Expansion was supposed to carry out projects which the Atlantic Development Board, ARDA and other agencies had recommended. I honestly believe that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) has given up completely on the Atlantic Provinces. I think he knows that there are 25 seats out of 32 which are held by Progressive Conservatives, and he does not see how he is going to change that. Therefore, he has given up completely on that region.

• (2:50 p.m.)

**Mr. Perrault:** That is not true. This is a non-partisan government.

**Mr. Comeau:** What else can I believe? The Department of Regional Economic Expansion was supposed to do the job. How did this department come to be established? During the 1968 election campaign, the Prime Minister made a promise to the Atlantic area that he had all the answers, and after a few months this department was established.

Still, Mr. Speaker, I am not against the department. As I have said, I have some reservations about certain things in connection with it, but really it is not doing anything for the Atlantic provinces which it is not doing for other regions. The minister is shaking his head. It is absolutely true, Mr. Speaker. A little time ago I complimented him, but he was reading something and did not hear me. I did say that his department, by providing money—

**Mr. Perrault:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Comeau:** —was trying to create jobs, but that really I had expected something great from the department. A bank can lend money. Any financial institution can lend money. I thought that with the Kents, and all these other great gentlemen, they were going to come up with something special for particular areas.

**Mr. Perrault:** You just wait.

**Mr. Comeau:** The hon. member for Burnaby-Seymour (Mr. Perrault) says wait.

**Mr. McGrath:** Why isn't Vancouver designated?

**Mr. Comeau:** It may not be too long before British Columbia is also designated. In effect, that is what the hon. member is saying. If you have a department that is supposed to look after regional disparities, and it does not provide the necessary incentives for a particular region, then there is no use in having that department. I am not against designating Montreal or Toronto, but if you provide the same incentives to Montreal as to Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, then holy smoke, Mr. Speaker, where do you think industry is going to go? I admit that there is a difference in the level of incentives, and I think the minister is to be congratulated in that respect. The incentives in these two cases are not exactly the same.