

*Regional Development Incentives Act*

purely gratuitous thing for me to say, I would think that the responsibility of the government in respect of the economy of that area is to help ensure, in co-operation with the governments of those provinces, a vigorous and diversified economy. As I understand it, one of the things the people living on the prairies want to see there is economic diversity.

To be blunt about it, I do not think the federal government should feel it is primarily concerned with the state of prosperity or otherwise of a particular community in Saskatchewan, Manitoba or Alberta. Of course there could be crises and catastrophes in respect of which the federal government would be expected to play its part.

It is my belief that in attempting to reach down below the region, assuming responsibility in terms of community development, the federal government through DREE is taking on so much it is not doing an adequate job and not concentrating itself adequately on the development of the region.

I am not suggesting that in a province like Ontario, for example, DREE should keep out all together. I can recognize that in terms of northern Ontario there is a region of sufficient size with enough in common that there is a problem of regional development. On the prairies a similar area may be that mid-north strip across the prairies and into British Columbia. There may be a problem there. I recognize that the Department of Regional Development should think in terms of regional development in these areas, but not in terms of uniform development within regions, which is more the responsibility of the provinces concerned.

If the Government of Canada adopts that approach then the programs it pursues and the methods it follows might well be very different in the Atlantic provinces and in eastern Quebec from those in northern Ontario or in western Canada. Such an approach might be very different, and the government might be much more effective and run much less risk of the federal agencies and departments involved being so bogged down in detail they cannot get anywhere really with regard to regional stimulus.

After all these years of DREE being in existence I have to say that there is no plan for the development of the Atlantic region as a whole. The Atlantic Provinces Advisory Committee, which succeeded the Atlantic Provinces Development Board, under the chairmanship of Professor Smith, emphasized time and time again a few years ago the importance of the federal government and the four provinces down there agreeing on a plan or a general approach. This has never been done. I do not know whether it has not been done because there has not been a will to achieve it, or because nobody has been able to produce a plan that looks as if it might work. Whatever the reason, there has been no plan put forward or adopted for that region as a whole, although there have been agreements entered into between the federal government and these provinces relating to parts of the provinces. The whole of Prince Edward Island is under a plan agreed to by Prince Edward Island and the Government of Canada, but that falls very far short of economic planning for the development of the maritime provinces or Atlantic region.

Are we going to enter the next five years in the life of DREE, drifting along as far as the Atlantic provinces are

[Mr. Stanfield.]

concerned the way we have been doing? I am not suggesting the people of the Atlantic provinces do not appreciate the effort that has been made, or the money that has been spent by the people of other parts of Canada in an attempt to attack the long standing and deep seated economic problems of the Atlantic region.

● (1510)

I ask whether the government is to drift into this renewal for another five years, going along in the same way as in recent years, simply improvising and certainly failing to produce any coherent attack on the problems of the Atlantic region? I am afraid that is exactly what is happening and that, as a result of this happening and continuing, the whole concept of fighting regional economic disparity in areas like the Atlantic provinces will become discredited. I am concerned that people in other parts of Canada will more and more become impatient about having to foot the bill. So I say to my colleagues in the House of Commons this afternoon that we are not doing very much simply in extending the life of DREE for another five years.

I say that members of the government and this House should face up to the inadequacy of what is being done. They should abandon the approach of having one uniform economic attack across the country. We should think in terms of our responsibility here being a regional one rather than thinking in terms of being responsible for the equal development of communities within regions, certainly in areas like the Atlantic provinces.

We should face up to the necessity of developing a coherent attack that is likely to produce some results rather than the kind of improvisation that is going on which has been very useful to particular communities but which has done very little indeed, I must say, to reduce economic disparity for the people in those regions as compared to people in other parts of the country.

I certainly intend to support the bill, Mr. Speaker. I will support the renewal of DREE's mandate, but I feel very strongly, when DREE is being given a mandate for another five years, that this is an appropriate time for the government to re-think the working of the DREE program, to re-think its approach, and to recognize that really at the present time it has not achieved a satisfactory program of regional development in the various parts of the country. The government must face up to the necessity of doing this. It will be a great tragedy if members of this House think they are doing their duty this afternoon simply by extending the life of DREE without at the same time facing up to the fact that DREE has been a very limited success despite the amount of money spent, and despite the good will behind it.

If members of this parliament are to discharge their responsibility to the people of Canada as a whole, as well as to the people living in these disadvantaged areas, I think they should make up their minds to face up to the responsibility and the challenge that a really effective fight against regional disparity involves. There must be co-ordination which DREE in itself does not provide. There must be a determined and orderly attack on these problems which is flexible in respect of the country as a whole.