

National Economic Development Board

and because neither of the two ministers who are supposed to be the chief sponsors are present—

Mr. Jones: They heard you were going to speak.

Mr. Pickersgill: We have the parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Gordon: I thought that was a pleasant remark I heard. I think that is a good enough excuse.

I say this, that in the course of the debate on this bill both the Minister of Labour and the Prime Minister will be expected to explain the reasons why they now believe in a concept which they castigated so violently such a short time ago. If the Prime Minister and the Minister of Labour do not give an unequivocal explanation of their strange conversion, we shall be entitled to assume that they still harbour deep reservations about this new approach to modern government.

It has been suggested that the strongest promoter within the cabinet of this legislation has been the Minister without Portfolio (Mr. McCutcheon). It is perhaps unfortunate that he became a member of the cabinet in a way which precludes him from arguing his case in this house except through the mouths of others, some of whom have been bitterly opposed to this whole idea of economic planning, or were so until a few short months ago. As the Minister without Portfolio knows well, an inefficient institution cannot be revamped or reorganized effectively merely by adding new pieces of administrative machinery, no matter how desirable in themselves such new pieces of machinery may be. Because of the nature of his experience, the Minister without Portfolio knows, even though his new found colleagues and associates may not, that the way to improve an inefficient organization is to start at the top, not at the bottom. As I suggested earlier today, I know that sometimes when the Minister without Portfolio has been confronted with such a problem in the past and in his other occupations, his first move has been to bring about a change in top management. It would be interesting to see if he attempts the same technique in the new surroundings in which he finds himself.

The shocking revelations of the Glassco commission about the inefficiency of the government's administrative organization will not surprise anyone who has watched this government perform. We have been here now for nine weeks, and in that time we have witnessed the inability of this government to plan the work of parliament itself—let alone the economy of Canada.

Mr. Harkness: Obstruction on the part of the opposition.

Mr. Jones: Particularly by the hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Argue).

Mr. Gordon: I would be delighted to tell hon. gentlemen opposite why, but I do not want to become involved in a political argument while we are discussing this particular bill. However, I have a few examples which hon. members may be interested in hearing. We have been here nine weeks, but we have heard nothing about the government's much touted long-term program for dealing with our basic economic problems—unemployment, and insufficient rate of economic growth and the adverse balance of payments situation. By this time, surely, no one really believes the government has any long-term program of this kind. In these last nine weeks we have not been presented with a budget or a proper financial accounting for the present fiscal year. We know by now that the government is afraid to present a budget for the current fiscal year since this would entail a vote on the \$200 million of additional taxes which are being levied in the form of customs surcharges by order in council. And we know the government is determined, by hook or by crook, to conceal from this house and the public the dubious authority which it has, if any, for the order in council to which I have referred. This failure of the government to bring down a proper budget and to obtain approval for taxes levied by order in council is an affront to every member of the house and an insult to the Canadian people.

As I have said, the government has shown itself unable to make decisions or to manage anything. In these circumstances I doubt if the government will be able to make any more use of an economic development board than it seems to be able to make use of other parts of the existing government service and machinery. In principle, we on this side are very much in favour of long term economic planning, but we remain to be convinced that the government is really serious or that the proposal is not, from their standpoint, only a piece of window dressing.

After all the advance notice and all the fanfare about this economic development board and all the things it is supposed to be designed to do, this Bill C-87 comes as a great let down and disappointment. According to this bill, the board will be nothing more than a tame, domesticated group working directly for the Minister of Finance. It is not to make independent reports to the public. In fact, it would seem that any contacts with the public would be carefully controlled and circumscribed by the ministry. So, stripped down to its essentials, all this bill seems to mean is