

ment policies in this country, then we are in a very sad state indeed. In no way has the minister alleviated growing apprehension that the department's program is a kind of giveaway program and that our regional development policy is governed by a handout mentality. Certainly many provincial premiers, especially the premiers of wealthier provinces, might think that is so. The minister has done nothing to show that that opinion is wrong.

I come from an area of chronic economic disparity. In the final analysis we are concerned not with aid but with trade. That is the cliché used by the people of underdeveloped countries and it is a good cliché to apply to the development policies of the federal government. After all, would it not be better if such policies were tailored to establish real trade and to abolish economic disparities? At present they seem to consist of stopgap measures of the kind that are too much in evidence.

At the beginning of my remarks I said there has been far too much secrecy about the operations of this department. I suppose that if we want information we shall have to rely on leaks slipping out from underneath bureaucratic doors, because so far there has been no objective presentation of information regarding the effective workings of the department. Until this information is made available to us, how can members of the House know if the department is being viably operated?

In the meantime, some people pay lip service to the work of the department. When the minister or his officials talk about consultation between the federal department and provincial departments as well as other agencies, they are not really talking about consultation in the full sense of establishing an over-all policy or strategy; they are talking primarily of negotiations in which regions, provinces or various groups see how much money they can get. That, really, is the sort of consultation that takes place at present. We must recognize that there must be genuine consultation between the various agencies that play an effective role in the development field. If there is to be consultation, there must be genuine public participation in the field of development. Public participation in the field of development, if I may refer to myself, is my hobby-horse. I ride it hard because I feel this philosophy crucial to the concept of effective basic development. The importance of that field has not been sufficiently recognized by the federal or provincial levels of government.

I am convinced that no major alterations will take place in the economic regions of this country which are presently underdeveloped and underutilized until there is a sufficient measure of public participation in this matter. I think this question has been fully and interestingly elaborated on in a document that comes in a sense from the minister's department. I am referring to the third report of the Canadian Council on Rural Development which reads in part:

In the first place, a development program of any kind needs to identify with reasonable precision its goals and objectives.

This statement, perhaps, might be news so far as the minister and his officials are concerned if it had not been made three years ago. Yet here we are, three years later, still waiting for some kind of reasonable and constructive response from the department. The report continues:

Secondly, programs must be instituted consistent with these goals

Regional Development

and objectives. These programs must be continuously evaluated both in terms of their effectiveness and in terms of priorities.

If this is not done those concerned with the operation of the program will not know whether they are succeeding or failing, and, for that matter, neither will the public.

A general declaration of intent is too vague to function as an operational goal. It is not enough, for example, to say that the goal of the Department is to iron out regional economic disparities. This is of the same rather unhelpful level of generality as to announce a program to fight inflation, or bad health, or crime. We tend to assume that Canadian governments seek to counter inflation, bad health, crime, regional disparity, and so on, as a matter of course.

Obviously, we need information and specific targets to which we can point. Secondly, Mr. Speaker, along with consultation there is need for effective co-ordination. I have said repeatedly, and I will go on mentioning this until the minister and his officials get the message, that the programs of the department need co-ordinating. Not only must there be co-ordination of specific programs which have vital roles to play—in earlier days we had in this area programs such as ARDA, AIDA, FRED, and so on—but there must be co-ordination with respect to many decisions which have ramifications for regional economic development. For instance, there must be co-ordination in such areas as fiscal and monetary policy. We must take into account the differences in the kinds of economic disparities that exist in the regions and there must be co-ordination in specific fields such as transportation.

Only last evening in this chamber I talked about the eight increases in freight rates which have taken place in the last 23 months. The level of freight rates has become prohibitive and has not helped our agricultural industry. Actually, freight rates have had a negative effect on the sale of basic commodities such as potatoes from Prince Edward Island. One can see what has recently happened with regard to feed grain assistance affecting parts of Atlantic Canada.

Also, we need to examine our tariff policy. Transport costs add to the cost of production. Although an initial grant may help a firm to get over the initial difficulties associated with establishing a business, such grant will do nothing to lower other ongoing costs of manufacturing and shipping.

Recently the Prime Minister has been telling us that the government is to introduce a policy with regard to foreign investment. He said something about domestic control of the national economic environment. I have directed questions to the Prime Minister ever since before Christmas. All that he has said since Christmas suggests he has engaged in the most perfunctory kind of consultation with the provinces with regard to what is possibly the most important decision in the national, economic field that might be made by this government.

• (1510)

It does not require too much brilliance to realize the amount of anxiety that exists in Atlantic Canada and with premiers in other parts of the country about prejudicial decisions that might be taken with regard to foreign investment and economic possibilities. We desperately need a national and economic strategy for this country, not one created in the isolation of the east block, apart