

National Economic Development Board

All the time our economy falls into the hands of foreign investors. All the time we lose more and more of our values. All the time our marketplace begins to control the Canadian mind, the Canadian spirit and the Canadian view. I appeal to hon. members to drop these shibboleths and these evocative words and to look at the modern economy with the analytical minds which I am sure they possess and in the scientific way required by modern society. Unless we do so, the challenge of totalitarians from the right or from the left will be difficult to meet and this country, like other countries, will face much more serious problems than those we face today.

Like other members of this house I may be forced to vote for second reading because a small faltering step may be better than nothing. I do it, I hope, as a responsible member representing a section of the Canadian people and I would not wish to stand in the way even of this kind of small step that may help the present government to make fewer mistakes. I am sure it will not help it to do better things but it may help it to make fewer mistakes. I wish to emphasize the fact that, as far as we are concerned, this is not planning in any sensible sense. As I think I have said twice already, this kind of cocktail planning is merely an indication that hon. members at last understand that something needs to be done, but there is not yet any indication that this government understands what it is that needs to be done.

Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources): Mr. Speaker, whenever a piece of legislation of the importance and the significance of that now before the house comes to the attention of hon. members there is always a tendency to look at it in terms of its ability to solve all the problems besetting the Canadian economy at the present time. This is particularly true of parties or individuals with a doctrinaire approach to economic matters. While it is true that the government believes the national development board contemplated by this legislation is a far reaching and important step in ensuring the continuing progress of the Canadian economy, we do not regard it as the universal solvent of all our difficulties. Rather we regard it merely as a continuation of the program that has been under way ever since this government took office in 1957. This is not the beginning of a new era. This is the continuation of a program that has been gradually unfolding under the leadership of the Conservative government.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, let me congratulate the Minister of Finance on bringing forward this legislation. Let me also remind the house that he is not a new convert to this kind of planning. As I listen to debates in the House of Commons I find that it is rather helpful to have a bit of historical perspective. I have been here since 1951 and sometimes I find there is a tendency for memories to be conveniently short. Without an historical perspective it is impossible to put the changing state of the nation into the right perspective. I recall that the Minister of Finance, when he was a member of the opposition, advocated just such a board as that which he is now proposing as a minister of the crown. I can recall back in those days members of the opposition at that time recommending that there should be a planning board to carry out a closer co-ordination and co-operation between the various sectors of the Canadian economy, and the government of the day turning down the suggestion because, as we used to hear so frequently, all was for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

Let me repeat that what has been going on is a continuation of the five year plan launched by the administration back in 1957. Change in that respect was long overdue since we had gotten into a rut in our attitude towards economic affairs in Canada as typified by the former administration in its attitude towards change in the agriculture industry, for example. I can remember the then minister of agriculture saying that while there was distress in the agriculture economy, it was just a passing phase and that eventually it would work itself out. As a matter of fact, I became a member of the House of Commons in 1951 as a result of the agriculture protest of that period. Then in the realm of industrial development there was almost absolute rigidity and indifference to problems. We were geared to a wartime economy. Industry was concentrated in a small area of Canada. It was outmoded and uncompetitive because it had its great period of expansion during the uneconomic circumstances of a wartime economy and we were failing to gear up to reality in that regard.

I came here from the field of education and I can remember trying to introduce in this house the subject of the crisis in education and being almost faced with a situation where the discussion was prevented because, under the constitution, education came under the jurisdiction of the provinces. It was not until 1957 we realized that we had a crisis in education when sputnik went into orbit. I do not mention 1957 for partisan or political