

Regional Development Incentives Act

We have in the Atlantic region capacities for improvement and economic advancement but not, it is likely, the capacity to become a great industrial region. We have already lost our industries to Montreal, and we did that before Montreal was made a designated area. But we have a tourist capacity which is magnificent—we do not have to say it; others have said it. What would the establishment of another national park do for Prince Edward Island? I say these things knowing that the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion is piloting the bill before us. But I have always thought that he should not be the sole repository of consideration in the realm of regional disparity. The government as a whole must be aware of the need to recognize the disparity which exists among the regions. There is no point in the minister working to overcome these disadvantages if other aspects of government take no note of these things.

There are so many practical ways in which we could improve our situation. What is needed in Atlantic Canada is a recognition that the sea is not a deterrent but an opportunity. There is wealth on the sea, in the sea and under the sea, and our maritime complexion is something we should cherish and develop. I am looking forward to the day when my province and the province of the hon. member for St. John's East will be one province.

Mr. McGrath: Hear, hear!

Mr. Macquarrie: I can see ways in which both provinces would be improved and in which Canada would be improved. Why not an accelerated program of shipbuilding subsidies so that we could get over to them with the greatest ease and efficiency to supply the outstanding products of our excellent soil—soil which, they say, as a result of a geological movement a very long time ago came originally from the extraction of their topsoil, since combined with our own.

Mr. McGrath: Hear, hear!

Mr. Macquarrie: So we have a double complement of soil fertility.

Mr. McGrath: You have ours.

Mr. Macquarrie: I want to make a distinction there. As a matter of fact, they have a higher birthrate than we do. I must say I was impressed by the sensible and sensitive speech of the Prime Minister. As to the possibility of trade, how much would it cost to upgrade, to enlarge, to construct a fleet of ships which would ply between the Atlantic provinces and the Commonwealth Caribbean? Is this not just the kind of expenditure which would be practical and meaningful? If these things could be done for Atlantic Canada, backed by the energy of our people, an energy all the greater because of many years of neglect, then we shall not worry about Montreal being designated. We, too, like Montreal. Montreal is ours. The whole country is our land.

I call on the minister with all the fervour one can command at nine o'clock in the evening to adopt an

[Mr. Macquarrie.]

imaginative program. The minister has made many mistakes, as he himself admitted in his testament or release a while ago. Although he has not always been wrong, I know that he will make more mistakes. However, I hope he will take a little more local advice, that he will not be cribbed, cabined and confined by his bureaucratic, technocratic advisers but will take that broad sweep for which he has been famous through the years, will look at the Atlantic provinces and say that something must be done for people in that region in order to help them move forward.

• (9:00 p.m.)

One of the minister's predecessors in the cabinet, Hon. Walter Gordon, was going to move the Maritimers, though they had been moving to Montreal and Toronto long since. I should like to see Maritimers moved forward, not moved out. I should like the federal government to take its share of responsibility. We entered confederation because we were wanted. Even little Prince Edward Island was wanted. Bargains were struck. We lost something by entering; we gained a lot by entering. If confederation means anything, it is a sharing not only of the advantages but of the disadvantages. The federal system works, in so far as it is efficacious, only to deal with and iron out some of the disadvantages that the federal structure imposes on regions.

Speaking for the one area which longer than any other has suffered from these disadvantages, I ask for something more than this measure. We will, of course, accept it with all our reservations. We are aware of the special problems that have arisen and we know that something must be done in other areas of Canada. We know that we in the Maritimes do not benefit from having unemployment all across the country. God knows, we want to fight unemployment all across the country. But I say to the minister, let him never reside in confidence upon this bill and feel that the job is even half done.

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): Mr. Speaker, I want to say a few words about Bill C-205 which proposes a number of changes to the Regional Development Incentives Act. I am sure that most members of the House welcome the changes that will be made, some of which I think are aimed specifically at problems in Quebec and have probably been spawned by events of recent weeks. To this extent we welcome them.

However, before I get to more specific parts of the new legislation I want to spend a few minutes taking a general look at the problems of regional inequalities and disparities in Canada. Regional inequities have been with us in this country for many years, but I think the tragedy is that since the 1920s, when statistics were first compiled in relation to regional problems in this country, the gap between the have and have-not regions has not been narrowed. This gap is evidenced in many ways, the most obvious of which is in the income of those who live in the have-not regions. For example, I note that from 1962 to 1964 the average per capita income of people living in Ontario was twice the average per capita income of