

*Supply—Regional Development*

Scotia, was the whole question of regional disparity.

It is believed, not only by the premier of Nova Scotia but by the Prime Minister himself, that one of the basic issues that concerns us at this time is the question of regional disparity and its effect upon national unity and the future of this country. We had tabled in the house this afternoon a further document from a very expensive commission which studies one problem confronted by this country. Now we have a very brief opportunity of examining the estimates of a department that is charged with attempting to deal with one of the very basic questions of national unity, that of regional disparity.

This problem is not new; it is one that goes back to the beginning of this century and before. It has been suggested it is part and parcel of confederation, which is 100 years ago. I am, quite frankly, disappointed with the way the government has handled this problem. In spite of the fact that we are dealing with estimates which by and large have been spent, and with a department that has not been created, the minister has not been able to offer to the committee this evening any concrete proposals, setting of goals or indication of priorities. This government has failed to deal seriously with the problem of regional disparity. I speak for the people of my province and those of many other parts of the country who have been hoping the government would be serious in dealing with these questions.

**An hon. Member:** Speak for yourself.

**Mr. MacDonald (Egmont):** I am. You can speak later, if you wish. The approach to the problem of regional disparity seems to be somewhat in conflict with some of the actions already taken by the government. Anyone who remembers back to the latter part of this summer, just prior to the reconvening of parliament, remembers the announcement that the winter works program was to be abandoned, and must have wondered what thoughts were going through the heads of the leaders of our government when they were considering summarily to abandon a program which, allowing for all its faults, had achieved a good deal in shoring-up many of the areas of difficulty and chronic unemployment.

We were then delivered a budget which we thought might outline some of the fiscal and

[Mr. MacDonald (Egmont).]

monetary priorities which are inherent in carrying out a program of regional development initiated by the government, at least in its initial stages. Instead, Mr. Chairman, we saw that this was a rich man's budget; that increased taxes were being levied on the lower income segment of our society. Then we saw a conference among federal and provincial ministers of finance in which it was suggested that in the foreseeable future the whole question of social welfare programs might be turned back to the provinces. This suggestion failed to recognize that such a program would create great economic hardship for the provinces and areas that the program was supposedly going to raise up under some kind of over-all program of regional development.

Tonight the minister suggests that he really has nothing to say to the committee in this respect. It is true that a short while ago he spoke to the committee of the house regarding regional development, but I know he would agree with me that there is not a great deal new that would indicate the directions to be taken by the government and the seriousness with which it viewed the program. It was really, in the main, a repeat of an earlier speech the minister made to the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council. This is the only thing we have heard today after almost half a year of waiting for action in this regard. I am wondering whether all we are having is a little bit of light housekeeping. I wonder, also, whether in fact there is on the part of the government a serious intention to deal with one of our great problems, that of national unity, because the problem of regional disparity is closely linked with it.

We want to hear the minister's views with regard to the programs being grouped together in his department at the present time. We want to know when the big plans, the programs for increasing employment in the near future, as contrasted with the more long range programs that will be covering a period of some 15 years, we are told, will be launched. What about some of the programs that have already been launched and which now seem to be faltering? I think of the Northumberland strait crossing, which is a program near to my heart. Apart from its long term economic value to Prince Edward Island, this program would improve the economic situation of the government of Canada in the way of costs of ferry construction and operation. What about a project like this, in