

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I should like to make two or three points in connection with DREE. I am not sure everyone will agree with me with regard to some of it, but I think I should emphasize that I am speaking in a very personal sense. I want to make it clear that I am not expressing a point of view on behalf of my party. There are certain views I hold in connection with DREE which I feel I can express at this stage of my political career without any misunderstanding. These are things I have said before and I would like to emphasize them again. I am sure there will be a good many on both sides of the House who will disagree with me. Nevertheless, it is important that some of these issues be discussed.

The first point I wish to make is this. It has been said many times that an attack on regional disparity involves, if it is to be effective, a very high degree of co-ordination within the government. It is so obvious I do not need to deal with the proposition at any length. It is evident that DREE could make a great effort to stimulate the economy of a region and that this effort could readily be offset by some countervailing policy adopted, perhaps unwittingly, by another department of the federal government.

The obvious example of this was when DREE was going ahead full force in 1969-1970 and when the Department of Finance was at the same time pursuing a policy of tight money—a tight fiscal policy. Those effects were felt first and foremost in areas of slower growth. Such a policy, pursued by the Department of Finance, negated the efforts of DREE. Then, again, there was the failure of the Department of Transport, for example, to pursue policies which complemented and reinforced the efforts made by DREE. This is another obvious instance where the thing could come apart and where a substantial effort made by the department could fall to the ground.

Also, there must, of course, be effective collaboration between the federal government and the province or provinces involved in particular programs. While there have been agreements between the federal government and particular provinces covering the development of certain parts of a province, I would say, speaking particularly of the Atlantic provinces, that there has not been the degree of co-operation or agreement essential as a foundation of an attack on regional disparity. I think, for example, of the long delay before the federal government and the province of Nova Scotia could come together to establish the so-called Magi experiment in the Halifax metropolitan area. This was a program which was announced by the federal government before the election of 1972. It drifted on for two or three years at least, substantially because the federal government and the government of Nova Scotia could not agree who would assume final responsibility for direction.

This is a key question with regard to regional development, and I do not pretend to have the complete answer: how would one secure within the federal government the necessary degree of co-ordination to launch an effective attack on regional disparity? Nor am I sure what kind of institutional arrangement might be needed within the federal government. I know some machinery has been established; I am sure there are interdepartmental committees, and so forth. But if the government is to make any dent in

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regional disparity in the Atlantic region, for example, during the next five years there has somehow to be a much higher degree of co-ordination of effort within the federal government itself and between the federal government and the provinces concerned. I am not sure, as I say, what the framework of the institutional arrangement should be, but I do say it does not exist today. There has not been, since DREE was launched, the necessary co-ordination and collaboration required for a successful effort.

● (1500)

It was rather naively assumed at the time the Department of Regional Economic Development was established that this department would in itself provide the necessary co-ordination of effort within the federal government. I think it was rather naively assumed that bringing together the agencies and what not that were brought together when DREE was established would in itself provide that necessary degree of co-ordination of federal effort. That obviously has not been the case.

I want to make it very clear, that to me it is not adequate for the federal government at this time simply to extend the life of DREE for a further period of five years and carry on with the same kind of inadequate institutional arrangements to do battle against regional disparity in an ineffective way. I want to make that point as forcefully as I can.

The second point I want to make, and this is where I expect I will run into specific disagreement from all quarters of the House, is that I think it is wrong and a substantial mistake to have anything like a uniform approach to regional economic development across the country. Let me make it clear what I mean. I think regional development in the Atlantic provinces, including parts of Quebec like the Gaspé Peninsula, have regional disparity problems that are different from those that exist generally in other parts of the country.

It would seem to me that what the Government of Canada should be concerned about basically is having vigorous regional economies in all parts of the country, in British Columbia, on the prairies, in the north, in Ontario and Quebec, and in the Atlantic provinces.

For example, I do not think the federal government should feel itself primarily responsible for assuring that all the communities in the Atlantic provinces are prosperous and dynamic. The federal government should not feel it has a primary responsibility to see that all the communities in my own province of Nova Scotia are dynamic in their growth. The responsibility of the federal government in connection with the Atlantic provinces is in terms of achieving a vigorous economy in the region which will develop its own dynamism.

One of the mistakes the federal government has made, and one of the things that is wrong with what the government has done to date, is that it is trying to do too much. What is wrong with the DREE program, in my judgment, is that the federal government is just trying to do too much rather than concentrate upon regional development, not allowing itself to be distracted, as I might put it, by thinking in terms of community development.

For example, with regard to the prairie provinces, and members from the prairie provinces might think this is a