

*Regional Development Incentives Act*

in Saskatchewan—or five different federal departments in development programs. I can name the project of Qu'Appelle River, which is very important for the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I could raise many other points. The hon. member for Kootenay West (Mr. Brisco) brought up some very interesting points of which I am very much aware; the department is very conscious of some of the difficulties we have in British Columbia, of some positive experiences, and some less positive we have had. We recognize it but hope those problems are only temporary, that we will solve them.

I thank the hon. member for Roberval (Mr. Gauthier), my colleague, for the support he graciously gives me as a neighbour in the province of Quebec and more specifically in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean area. I can assure him that my concern for that area goes without saying, but he must not forget, as he said himself, that I am a federal minister and that I can in no way favour my area to the detriment of other regions. Anyway, as he said, he does not want my area to benefit from undue privileges; but it does need federal assistance. I can assure him that I shall discharge all my responsibilities to ensure that the projects put forward by my area are given prompt attention by the officials of my department, with the hope that we will be able to contribute to alleviate unemployment; the unemployment rate we both have in our constituencies is 30 per cent, which is very high. I think nobody in this House will resent me if we succeed in supporting some projects in our areas to alleviate the great difficulties we are in.

As to the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) he is an experienced man in this House. Indeed, I have known him ever since I came here in 1962 and I can assure him that the decentralisation of the department that took place 18 months ago, barely two years after a revision of our policy, was certainly not done with a view to creating jobs. If we wanted to have those regional offices headed by assistant deputy ministers it is precisely to indicate the seriousness we were attaching to that decentralisation and the power given to those officers—a decision making power.

Decisions can be made on the spot on a very large number of applications submitted. That is why we have assistant deputy ministers in our four regions to be sure that the greatest number of projects possible can be rapidly dealt with and a decision made in the shortest period of time possible. We gave those people a high level of responsibility and I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that that level of responsibility produced a lot of effect up to now, and I could only quote the number of related agreements that were signed in the last 12 months. Indeed, it was just 18 months ago when we signed the general agreement with the provinces. We signed a very large number of related agreements, particularly in the maritime provinces, of course, but also in the prairie provinces, Saskatchewan being the one with the greatest number now in effect. We hope soon to sign several others with the province of Manitoba. Indeed, I am supposed to go out to that province in the weeks to come to meet with provincial authorities.

Of course, it is always relatively easy to criticize the activities of a department. A department like the one I head, of course, has no precedents on which it can base its action. It must innovate. It must acquire experience. It

must work with provincial governments, local institutions. And that is what we did, that is what we tried to do more with provincial governments by identifying priorities both at the industrial and infrastructural levels, ascertaining with the provincial governments the best use possible for the amounts that are made available to us.

In answer to a criticism which has been directed at the department, namely that we give multinational corporations, companies and industries in general too much help while not giving enough for provincial and municipal infrastructures, I would like to point out to hon. members that out of a budget of roughly \$500 million, \$70 only are allotted to help industry in general and the balance to infrastructure development and the implementation of programs which are proposed to us by provincial governments. This shows a large part—I should say a very large part of the departmental monies are earmarked for infrastructure development in the hope and trust that this is consistent with the priorities not only of the provinces but also of the townships and their people, as our action is geared, of course, to improving the standards of living of people who live in the areas said to be of slow expansion rate or underprivileged.

We would like their living standards to be such that people will appreciate living there, and above all that those who have deserted those areas to go and make a living in big cities such as Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver and Winnipeg, for example, will be enticed to go back home.

But, Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the department's activities, because of its objectives, necessarily give rise to conflicts with the large centres of the country which probably see our department as a group trying to impede the development of the large centres like Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver or Winnipeg. I would like to conclude my remarks on this particular point: I think it is in the interest of the large centres, in both the short and especially the long run, that we preserve in the bordering areas of Canada, the peripheral areas, those described as disadvantaged, a very strong percentage of people to prevent this phenomenon of Canadians concentrating in large centres, with all the attendant effects and problems, namely overpopulation, pollution and, particularly, the very high cost of housing, for instance.

If we manage somehow to slow down that exodus of people towards large cities through department activities, we shall be and we are serving the interest of great Canadian cities. I insist on that: If we want natural resources supplies to remain adequate for great cities, if we in this country want to have people in distant areas where those resources are to be found, if we want them to stay there, the quality of life in those parts must be adequate enough to prompt them to stay, and young people must be provided the prospect of employment and a rewarding future.

Only if we are prepared to transfer funds from the federal treasury to those regions to upgrade, develop and maintain them, will we accomplish something, because it is not enough to say that those regions will supply great cities with raw natural resources, it is not good enough, it is far from being good enough. We should do more than that and make sure the processing of those raw materials will take place in those areas to a degree which will ensure