

Adjournment Debate

over a year ago. Where was the New Democratic Party at that time? They defeated us simply for political expediency.

May I call it ten o'clock, Mr. Speaker?

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[English]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 40 deemed to have been moved.

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA—DECENTRALIZATION PROGRAM. (B)
JUSTIFICATION FOR PROGRAM

Hon. Walter Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, on October 16 last I asked a question of the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Johnston) with respect to the infamous decentralization program of the government. I indicated at that time that the program seemed to have some life in it again, marked by the move of the philatelic mail order section of the post office to the riding of the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen), together with the announcement at a management meeting that the citizenship records branch of the Department of the Secretary of State was being transferred. The minister's answer with respect to this is very important. He did not deny the two organizational moves that I mentioned. He went on to say that "the government has never backed off the policy" of decentralization, and that ministers would be making announcements from time to time. I assume these announcements will be timed to suit the political patronage convenience of the respective ministers. That is some program, Mr. Speaker. The old policy has been dusted off and we can now expect its revitalization.

● (2200)

I have to tell the House again tonight that there is yet another proposal before the Treasury Board which has to do with the land engineering test establishment of the Department of National Defence at Orleans, Ontario. The people who realize the importance of the presence of that government high technology establishment in the capital of Canada are saying, "build a building here so we can get on with our work". There are others who are giving active consideration to moving it somewhere away from the centre of high technology in Canada. This is another waste, and I think the government should be condemned for it.

I characterize this return to the policy of decentralization as a return to the most wasteful, cost ineffective, demoralized and patronage ridden program this Liberal government has ever foisted upon the public service, the national capital and the public of Canada.

The Clark government reviewed all decentralization programs of the former Liberal government in the summer of

1979 in the context of expanded priority to restrain government spending as well as to eliminate the negative effect on the delivery of government services. The decision not to proceed at that time in 19 cases effected a savings of at least \$200 million, with extended costs of \$250 million at that time, and the revitalization of this program means now a cost to the treasury in excess of \$300 million, if this proceeds.

This is the extent of the program the minister has indicated is being revitalized: the Farm Credit Corporation headquarters to Camrose; the Department of National Health and Welfare, Bureau of Dangerous Drugs, to North Bay; the Department of National Health and Welfare, a lab to Kamloops, British Columbia; the Department of National Health and Welfare, medical services, Ontario Regional Office, to Thunder Bay, and Statistics Canada, Ontario Regional Office, to North Bay. The list continues: the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, a subdivision, to Thunder Bay; Canada Employment and Immigration Commission, employer registration division—wage loss insurance—, to Bathurst, New Brunswick; the Department of National Health and Welfare and Department of Supply and Services, income security offices and support services from Halifax, to Sydney, and from Toronto to Peterboro, Chatham and Timmins; the Post Office, philatelic services, we already know about; External Affairs, passport mail service, to Sydney; Revenue Canada Taxation Centre for Career Development, to Rigaud, Quebec; Revenue Canada Taxation Data Centre, to Jonquière; the Department of Energy, Mines and Services, Survey, mapping branch, to Sherbrooke, Quebec; the Department of Communications, telecommunications regulatory service, to Quebec City; the Canada Pension Plan, claims and benefits, Ontario Region, to Toronto; and the Department of Environment, Hydrology Research Institute, to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. That is the extent of the program being revitalized and to be announced from time to time as it suits the political convenience of the ministers.

Some 3,200 employees in the national capital region will be affected by the piecemeal revitalization of those plans. This was unaffordable and unwise in 1979, and it is even more unaffordable and unwise to proceed, or even to contemplate proceeding in this way at this time. Aside from the resources I have mentioned, the waste in human terms, the upset in terms of the public servants and their families in regard to this matter is something that is beyond measure.

Certainly if there is to be decentralization, the criterion must be the effective delivery of the services of the Government of Canada. None of those that have been announced and none of those contained in a revitalized decentralization program meet this criterion, and that is the sad case. Of course, with respect to this government, efficiency and effective delivery of service is not the criterion. The criterion is good, old-fashioned patronage; a building here, an extended runway there, and the public interest be damned. That characterized the program at the beginning, and that will characterize the program as it now proceeds.