

Adjournment Debate

cussions with the new chairman of the Atlantic Development Council respecting DREE's role and effectiveness in the Atlantic provinces. The minister also mentioned that he would be meeting premiers from the three maritime provinces on the same subject at the council of maritime premiers. This will take place next Monday in Summerside.

With respect to DREE initiatives in Nova Scotia, the hon. member may wish to know that negotiations are proceeding very well. The details of a general development agreement are being worked out between officials of DREE and senior representatives of the Nova Scotia government. There are also a number of joint task forces considering specific areas for new initiatives. This federal-provincial effort is, of course, in addition to the regional development incentive program which is available throughout Nova Scotia as well as the special areas program which applies to the Strait of Canso and Halifax-Dartmouth areas. The minister will be making announcements respecting new initiatives as formal agreements are concluded with the government of Nova Scotia.

REGIONAL ECONOMIC EXPANSION—DATE OF TABLING OF PROGRAM FOR NORTHERN ONTARIO—HIRING OF PERSONNEL FOR NORTHERN ONTARIO OFFICES

Mr. John Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, on June 11, three months ago, I asked the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Jamieson) if he could inform the House what action the government was intending to take with respect to economic development in northern Ontario. The minister at that time advised me that his department was holding meetings with the provincial government and that another meeting was scheduled for the week of June 18. He also said:

One of the preliminary matters they will be discussing is ways and means by which we can make a bigger impact on regional development in northern Ontario.

Yet yesterday, when I asked the minister whether he could inform us when the government intends to table its program for industrial development in northern Ontario, I was treated to the standard answer. He said:

I do not know the precise date but . . . the negotiations with the government of Ontario are proceeding very well.

He then predicted that it should not take more than a matter of a month or a few weeks. I must say that until very recently I was finding it somewhat difficult to believe that these much heralded talks were actually taking place. My worry now, however, is whether they are ever going to end. By the way, Mr. Speaker, I am not suggesting that the federal Liberals and the provincial Tories should stop talking altogether. In northern Ontario we have been listening to the Liberals for 50 years, and the Tories for 30, and if they ever stopped talking, the silence would be absolutely deafening. What I am saying is that it is time they started doing something beside holding tea parties in Toronto and Ottawa.

The minister can surely not say that he has not been made aware of the realities of northern Ontario. Our problems are most serious and pressing. The minister has assured me on countless occasions that he knows what our problems are. He has assured me that he shares my sense

[Mr. Turner (London East).]

of urgency. I say that if this is so, it is time he did something about it.

We heard a good deal about the so-called reorganization of DREE. I want to talk about this because I think it points up very accurately the complete lack of sensitivity and even common sense on the part of this government toward those areas which are in need of solutions, not empty gestures. For all the foo-farra about decentralization, which I think is an excellent program when carried out with some intelligence, what happens in Ontario? We get a regional office in Toronto. Yes, we get a sub-office in Thunder Bay. But I want to know, why should an office dealing with regional economic disparities in Northern Ontario be located in Toronto?

If anything has contributed to the underdevelopment of northern Ontario, it has been the centralization of government and everything else in Toronto and the consequent insensitivity to, and ignorance of, the needs of the north. I note that the Maritimes will have six offices for an area smaller than northern Ontario in geographic size and not much bigger in population, while northern Ontario will have only one.

The Maritimes surely need the six offices, but by the same token northern Ontario needs more than a sub-office in Thunder Bay. Indeed, where do the plans for decentralization stand at this time? Just last week the minister was quoted as saying that public servants with roots in Ottawa are throwing a monkeywrench into DREE's decentralization machinery. Yet the Public Service Alliance spokesman for these employees says that not one DREE employee has been asked to move to a regional post. It is the middle of September and apparently nobody has been asked to move yet.

I call on the minister to get serious about decentralization of DREE. If he cannot get civil servants in Ottawa to move to northern Ontario, I point out to him that there are many capable and experienced people in northern Ontario who could be seconded by the government to staff DREE offices there.

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I call on the government to become serious about the disadvantaged area of northern Ontario. At present there are nine Liberal seats out of a possible 12 in northern Ontario. I suggest that unless this government becomes far more serious about our area than it has shown itself to be in the past and present, it will not have many of those seats left after the next federal election.

Mr. Charles Turner (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, I wish to reply to the hon. member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez) on the minister's behalf. There has been considerable progress in the discussions between officials of DREE and the government of Ontario. Hon. members will be aware that in May and June the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Jamieson) met with each of the provincial governments to consider ways in which DREE programs and policies could be more effectively utilized throughout Canada. This action was well received by the provinces, and joint federal-provincial working parties have since been dealing with the details of new general development agreements. The