

The correction of regional disparities and the equalization of services for all Canadians have been made a principle of the new Constitution and made effective by the Constitution Act of 1972. However, have we really taken equalization and the correction of regional disparities out of their former context? Are they not still a kind of civic welfare payment? Has the Government of Canada really changed its attitude in the area of correcting regional disparities? Mr. Speaker, I must say, after having made what I think is an honest assessment, that the attitude has not changed. The Government still thinks in terms of hand-outs. It still thinks in terms of solving problems as they arise. The Government still thinks in terms of correcting difficulties when they occur. There is no over-all plan. There is no grand expansion. There is no war on regional disparity such as President Kennedy established in the United States with his war on poverty. We have no war on regional disparity and that is what we must have in order to accomplish anything.

As one item of evidence I will point to the fact that the former Department of Regional Economic Expansion never had a role at the heart of the Government of Canada under the Liberal administration. It was always a Department of Government on the periphery of the real force and power within the Government. That has not changed with the change of name to the Department of Regional Industrial Expansion. The new Department is no different from the old. It is merely a change of name. It is not at the heart of Government. Mr. Speaker, that is the problem. There is no one, no officer, no person in the Government of Canada, who has taken responsibility for the vital national goal of the correction of regional disparity. Therefore, while we have the constitutional provisions, whatever they mean in legal terms, we do not have the spirit or the attitude of a government which will support in a real way that provision which has now been enshrined in the Constitution. Therefore, our problems remain.

I will examine those problems very quickly, Mr. Speaker. In Atlantic Canada there are four separate provinces. There are Canadians who would have those provinces unify and become one province. However, that is simply not possible. Each province, whether it is New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island or Newfoundland, has its own separate identity. I have no reason to believe that those identities will be changed in the decades to come, so we must deal with the reality of the situation, that is, that there are four separate provinces. Each of those provinces has its own resources and merits. I am particularly concerned, of course, with the Province of Nova Scotia. However, I do not want to speak about the provinces in an abstract way.

The greatest resource of each of those provinces, and particularly of the Province of Nova Scotia, is the people. That is to say, the people are the greatest resource of the Province of Nova Scotia, so I would like to examine the people in the light of their problems, which result from the regional disparity inflicted on the Province of Nova Scotia since 1867. I will speak first of all about the problems of the people in Nova Scotia.

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When one looks at the statistical analysis one finds two very important things. This applies to any Canadian. If your income is low and your debt is high, you are in economic difficulty. That is exactly the situation in the Atlantic area. The incomes of people in the Province of Nova Scotia are substantially below the national average, and especially below the incomes enjoyed by people provinces like Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario. By way of example, the average income in the Province of Alberta is \$37,645, while the average income in Nova Scotia is \$26,944.

One can also compare the public debt which has been incurred by the governments of those provinces and must be paid for by the people, the taxpayers, the income earners. We all know about the relatively debt free position of the Province of Alberta due to its Heritage Fund. The public debt in Nova Scotia has risen to \$2 billion. That is not through any fault of the Government of the Province of Nova Scotia. In order to maintain the level of public services guaranteed by Section 36 of the Constitution Act, the Government of Nova Scotia has had to borrow to meet the needs and demands of the people of Nova Scotia in this modern Canada. That has resulted in a substantial provincial debt, although I hasten to add that that debt is not as high as those of the other Atlantic provinces. However, that is the situation generally in Atlantic Canada; low incomes and high debts. Therefore, the provincial governments are left without the resources to create economic expansion within their own area. That is a fact of life that can be established and documented and it cannot be blamed upon any of the individual governments of the Atlantic provinces, particularly the Province of Nova Scotia. That is why the correction of economic and regional disparity becomes a problem for the national Government and why the Government of Canada must set that as a national goal in the achievement of which all Canadians must participate. In making my own case let me say that that is why we have Section 36 of the Constitution Act of 1972. It represents the agreement of all Canadians to eliminate regional disparity as a national goal.

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In standing in this Parliament of Canada and reminding parliamentarians, and through them Canadians, of these facts, I am simply making the case that the Atlantic area, provinces like Nova Scotia, require substantial and indeed massive government assistance to eliminate the economic disparity from which those provinces in that area of Canada suffers.

We have looked at the problems; let us look at some of the solutions. I have already indicated that the Department of Regional Economic Expansion and its successor Department of Regional Industrial Expansion have not resolved the problem. I believe the reason is that those Departments are not and have never been an integral part of the Government of Canada. They are not at the heart of government policy but are, rather, on the periphery, just like the Department of National Defence is outside the heart of the Government. It is non-political and does not get the special grants such as we have seen paid out in the Liberal constituencies across Canada. It does not get special treatment.