

MANPOWER—OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH PROJECTS—
NATURE OF CONSULTATION OF PRIORITIES—REASON FOR
DISCONTINUANCE OF CONSTITUENCY ADVISORY GROUPS

Mr. David MacDonald (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, the question I am raising again this evening is the original question raised on March 4 with respect to the notice given by the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Andras) to members of parliament on February 28 concerning the letter that had been circulated indicating both the nature of the selection process for Opportunities for Youth grants and the initial allocation of funds.

● (2200)

Hon. members may recall that on March 4 I raised with the minister the problem of the abandonment of the previous principle of constituency advisory groups. The minister indicated to me at that time that they were being abandoned for two reasons, which he indicated. First, he said there was some question about the time involved in terms of processing in order to approve these projects and notify the fortunate recipients, and the other question was a matter of the amount of money. In a later answer to me the minister said in the House that there was also a problem in respect of the selection of Opportunities for Youth groups, which would take place in what are known as 33 labour market areas rather than within precise constituency boundaries.

I must say at the outset that I find the minister's logic and argument fallacious and illusory. If he is talking about time to process these grants, I do not know for the life of me why there should be less time available this year than there was in any preceding year when this principle was adopted. As a matter of fact, it seems to me that the deadline of March 15, and more than a month to file before the projects would finally be approved and the individuals notified, is more than sufficient time for individual constituency advisory groups to meet. We have known for the past few days, for instance, the list of projects which have been submitted from the Egmont constituency. Tomorrow evening I plan to meet with a publicly-appointed representative group of citizens from the Egmont area who will advise me and, hopefully, the minister as to the projects they think merit funding, and some priority in respect of these projects. That does not seem to involve an inordinate amount of time and I think the minister's excuse that there is no time is really no excuse at all.

Secondly, the minister said there is the problem of distribution into the market areas. Since there is no further explanation of what this means, and since I assume that projects are being listed and sent to members item by item on a continuing basis, this is simply some kind of bureaucratic gobbledygook which has no real impact on the problem. Thirdly, when the minister suggested there is not much money being used, I am reminded of the minister's predecessor from the same riding who is reported to have said, and who will go down in history having had this attributed to him, "What's a million?" This minister is apparently prepared to say, "What's \$25 million or \$30 million?" It is still a great deal of money in this country and I think the government has the responsibility to be accountable to the public in this House.

Adjournment Debate

There is an additional aspect to this matter. I think there is necessity for an effective accounting to the young people themselves. The young people who take the time and the trouble to submit projects have a right to know that they are selected on some other basis than the smile of lady fortune, the turn of a wheel or by some official who has the most peripheral kind of information and awareness about a constituency, with the result that decisions are not made on the basis of sound, rational judgment or comparison.

In addition to that, if that is not sufficient, we have had the ridiculous situation that in a great many areas there has been no project officer either to advise or to assist young people or, in later stages, to assist in processing or judging these projects. It is true that there is no project officer in a number of cases where there was none during the submission period of this program, but the thing that strikes me as a piece of irony is the response to my criticism about the lack of project officers—and Prince Edward Island must stand out as the classic case. The very day the minister announced the new Opportunities for Youth program, the number of project officers in Prince Edward Island, and I believe New Brunswick, ceased to exist, or at least the last ones had served their time and that was the end.

From the end of January until March 15, when the deadline closed for submissions, there were no project officers in Prince Edward Island. I think this can be verified quite easily. I do not think there were any in New Brunswick, and there was only a limited or skeleton staff operating from the regional office at Halifax. I do not have the facts and figures as to the rest of the country, but I presume the same situation pertained. And this is the situation which the minister says is rational and fair for the young people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, quite frankly I think the administration of OFY has gone full circle to the first year of its innovation. There is no excuse for this. It must seem to some people that this is an example of irresponsibility. I think the department is deliberately trying to torpedo this operation and make it so ineffectual and so insufficient that one would not consider funding it in successive years. I think this is a great loss to the young people who have submitted these programs over the years and who this year have submitted many worth-while proposals. I hope the minister will begin to take seriously a program which has been taken seriously by many young people in this country.

Mr. Mark MacGuigan (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, as my minister has stated in the House, members of parliament will not be put in the position of having to decide the priority of projects. The government agrees with the hon. member for Egmont (Mr. MacDonald) that that would be most improper. On the other hand, hon. members will be consulted in the assessment of project applications. We will also consult with the provinces and with local agencies, community groups, civic officials and persons of expertise in the fields which might be of interest to this year's OFY program. In the last analysis, however, the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Andras) is the only person who decides the approval or rejection of any project application.