

before the committee in which there was an indication that there was a pending agreement between the federal government and the provinces interested. I was wondering whether the hon. gentleman took the trouble to ask the Minister of Finance for a copy of that agreement or any of those agreements to find out what the terms of those agreements might have been.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): The minister cannot produce them because he does not have them.

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, I can certainly assure my hon. friend that if the Minister of Finance were here right now I would be more than willing to ask him whether I could see any agreements that he can produce of the nature to which he referred.

Mr. Blais: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance did indicate, according to the committee's proceedings, that that agreement was available to all members at any time. Surely, the hon. member knows of the offer made by the Minister of Finance. That agreement would have been available, notwithstanding the fact that the minister is not here at this time.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): The minister was never before the committee.

Some hon. Members: He was.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Alexander: He was there in spirit only.

Mr. Stevens: In conclusion, may I emphasize that I feel this is one more example of the government trying to cut down the right of this parliament to examine expenditures. There is no question, and let there be no doubt, that we are in favour of a winter works program, but surely that does not mean that fact can then be used as a lever to have us accept something that is so totally unacceptable as this present procedure. I would also emphasize that we in the House have ample evidence to justify a lack of confidence in the government's handling of such money matters and that we would be irresponsible if we did not object, as we are doing, to this blanket endorsement of the \$350 million.

If we are to learn any lesson, let us take a look at what has transpired in one Crown corporation, namely the Export Development Corporation. May I point out that that corporation, for example, with no reference to this House, has \$1 billion of outstanding financing contracts, 50 per cent of which are for the benefit of eight corporations in this country of which 50 per cent are subsidiaries of foreign concerns. This is the way in which the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Gillespie) have been handling funds of a non-budgetary nature, and I feel it is time that parliament, and certainly the people of Canada, dug in their heels against this irresponsible management of finances.

[Translation]

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, we have now before us a very important budget item according to the statement made jointly by the Minister of

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Finance (Mr. Turner) and the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Andras) on December 6, 1972.

So we have the impression that the government realized that there was to be an increase in unemployment during the first months of 1973. Yet, former federal minister Kierans had predicted a high rate of unemployment and stated that not only would employment become a very crucial problem but that there would also be a strong increase in inflation.

We realized one day that Mr. Kierans' predictions were accurate. And, on September 7, the government published a release announcing that a new local initiatives program would be set up in the first days of December to allow the creation of a number of jobs and also to reduce the scourge of unemployment.

The process is excessively slow although it had been announced at the time that the required forms would be available starting October 1 and several people realized that a few days had elapsed in October before the forms were available to allow the promoters of projects to submit them early enough to be activated and create a certain number of jobs.

Mr. Speaker, at December 31, according to the information published, 13,163 projects had been submitted under the local initiatives program. This shows that Canadians believed very seriously in the worthiness of the program and the good intentions of the government since this figure exceeds by far the number of projects submitted during the last fiscal year.

• (1610)

Mr. Speaker, of the 13,163 projects submitted, only 1,400 had been approved on December 31, which means that very few projects had been carried out before the end of 1972. In Quebec, also according to my information, only 427 projects had been accepted as at December 31. This is probably the explanation for the figures relating to unemployment then, because of the delay in the execution of these projects, the number of jobs available was of course decreasing and, automatically, the unemployment rate increased.

On December 6, the Minister of Finance had his colleague the Minister of Manpower and Immigration announced a special program for municipalities and provinces, requiring \$350 million. The department involved had issued a most elaborate press release to invite provinces and municipalities to participate in a most active way in order to help the federal government reduce unemployment.

But most municipalities are indebted to the extreme and one only has to meet municipal administrators and talk a little about their problems to find out very rapidly that the same problem faces all municipalities. In fact, the rate payers are asking for improved public services; they want to get better water, sewer, depollution and road services, but municipalities do not draw the required revenues to meet immediately this demand and the needs of rate payers.

I have often pointed out in the House that the federal government should pay more attention to municipalities and their sources of revenue and transfer as soon as