

by the literal construction of the orders themselves as by the consideration of what has been the practice of the house with respect to them.

We must take into consideration that after the 1963 amendment to the Senate and House of Commons Act was enacted, standing order 15(2a) was adopted by the house, and that in the same year such standing order was adopted the house accepted that the hon. member for Red Deer be permitted to make comments on ministerial statements, although at that time he had in his party fewer members than the number provided in the amendment to the Senate and House of Commons Act.

Following such precedents, I do not see how I could come to the conclusion that standing order 15(2a) is to be interpreted in the light of the amendment to the above mentioned act. At the same time I do not think it would be reasonable to conclude that independent members fall under standing order 15(2a). I do not think, also, that the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River who contributed to the discussion, comes under this category. But until such time as the house amends the standing order dealing with ministerial statements so as to define more precisely the right to comment thereon, I am of the opinion that I should follow the practice which prevailed during the last session and interpret the standing order as permitting comments on ministerial statements by the Leader of the Official Opposition and by spokesmen for the New Democratic Party, the Ralliement Cr ditistes and the Social Credit party.

Mr. H. Russell MacEwan (Pictou): Mr. Speaker, we listened with interest to the statement by the Minister of Finance with regard to this matter of the municipal development loan fund. Let me say, first of all, that this six months extension is not, in our opinion, long enough. I would remind the minister that when his predecessor introduced this legislation in 1963 he promised that should the municipalities have used the \$400 million before the March 1, 1966 deadline there would be no hesitation in asking parliament to make further funds available. Apparently hon. gentlemen opposite have now changed their minds, and after having kept the municipalities waiting for a long time to see what would happen the minister comes forward today, February 18, to make this disappointing statement. This is not good enough.

I would point out that in areas such as the Atlantic area this fund has been of great

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assistance. Its continuation for a further six months only will be a keen disappointment. During the last reported period of 1965, unemployment in the Atlantic area amounted to 6 per cent according to figures from the Dominion Bureau of Statistics. The development loan fund was doing good work in areas such as mine where four schools within a radius of five miles were undertaken under this scheme. I do not know whether they can be completed within the six months period now allowed.

I am glad the minister and the government have listened to the representations of the official opposition and allowed at least some extension of the terms of this act but, as I say, the intention was surely to assist in providing employment, especially in areas like my own.

Mr. T. C. Douglas (Burnaby-Coquitlam): Mr. Speaker, the announcement made by the Minister of Finance will cause considerable disappointment among the municipalities of Canada. The concession to extend the period for another six months will be of some help, but the minister has not made it clear whether this extension will enable all the municipalities which now have projects under way to qualify for the 25 per cent forgiveness.

• (11:20 a.m.)

It seems to me, in view of the very small sum of money involved, the very least the government might have done would be to agree that any projects commenced prior to this date would be allowed to qualify for the 25 per cent forgiveness because, as the minister has pointed out, there have been a great many delays due to causes beyond the control of the municipalities, which have accounted for the fact that they have not been able to complete their work. Some will certainly be unable to complete their programs by September, and it will be a very serious loss to them if they are denied the 25 per cent forgiveness provision.

The second announcement by the minister, that the government has no intention of extending the Municipal Development and Loan Act beyond March 31, is even more disappointing. I think the conference of mayors and municipalities felt fairly confident, when the former minister of finance introduced this measure, that we were taking the first step toward setting up in Canada a permanent municipal loan fund. The house has to remember that there are a great many