

Grants to Municipalities

This reference would allow for full involvement of municipal groups and organizations and local authorities, including the provinces, in the development of new legislation. In my discussions with some provincial people I have found that even some provincial authorities support many of the central concerns which have been raised by municipalities.

The basic problem with this legislation is that it just does not go quite far enough. The reason that that is important is that municipalities are the level of government which have the least revenue in the country. The federal government, by contrast, has the greatest range and depth of revenues. By not changing this legislation as much as it should be changed, we are in effect asking the poorest levels of government to carry the largest burden while the federal government gets away with carrying the smallest burden in the package.

I note that the minister indicated an interest in revenue sharing when he was speaking before the committee. I think he was referring to the present federal-provincial discussions with regard to the constitution, and if the federal government was interested in pushing adequate revenue sharing at that level, I think that would be something which would be well worth supporting.

However, until we reach that nirvana where the federal government is willing to get behind the municipalities and fight for them to have sufficient and adequate revenues, we have before us this legislative measure. Before we move to a constitutional solution there is a legislative solution, and surely the basic constitution of the country is more than simply words in a document. It has to do with the way we practise government, the way we act. By adopting the kinds of legislation which would be most sensitive to the local municipal authorities, we would in practice be changing the way government is carried out in this country and changing the constitutional practice. I think this should be a notion which should be welcomed particularly in Parliament, because it has always been the tradition of British parliamentary practice to change the constitution by practice or by custom rather than by changing the words of a written document.

● (2120)

It is not only in the area of this piece of legislation itself in terms of revenues for local governments that this bill points to the shortcomings of the policies of the government of the day. I think that the lack of action as it affects municipalities and cities is also a grave oversight. I am thinking of the whole lack of any reference in this session in a comprehensive way to urban policy. When I refer to urban policy I am thinking about the need to co-ordinate the activities of either housing or transportation or programs for intercities in such a way that these things work together. I am thinking now of my own city of Winnipeg where the activities in what was known as the neighbourhood improvement program have often conflicted with transportation activities.

In Winnipeg we have a conflict between an overpass and a neighbourhood improvement program which is benefiting from DREE funds which have recently been announced for the

Winnipeg core area redevelopment. We will once again have this kind of conflict of objectives where DREE funds are obtained to redevelop the inner-city and yet the federal government is financing the transportation route and overpass which is going to cut through the same neighbourhood, thus making it a less desirable place for families. In other words, by cutting through another major transportation route, the area would be less desirable for families to live in, and therefore the federal government will be undercutting its own DREE spending.

Another fundamental area in which I find deficiencies in terms of municipal and urban areas is the whole area of Indians in the city. In this session we have heard from the other side of the House the government pledge that by the fall the government will be taking some action with regard to Indians, and yet I heard no commitment to any action for Indians living in the city. We find that there is a great need for action in this area. We hope that when the government announces its action with regard to Indians in the fall, it will include action for Indians living in the city, whether they be status or non-status Indians.

Coming back more closely to the legislation, I should just like to say that this is an improvement over past legislation. It brings about an improvement basically through administrative changes, and while those improvements are welcomed, it would have been far preferable if we had gone back to the basic principle and developed legislation which had real respect for local authority and local democracy and really reflected the desires and wishes advocated to us by representatives of the municipalities in this country.

Mr. Bill Yurko (Edmonton East): Mr. Speaker, I will not take up much of the time of the House. I am pleased to see the minister in his place because I would like to address my questions specifically to him. First I should like to indicate to the House that the minister was quite accommodating in committee in meeting the demands of the various members of the committee. He made a number of commitments in committee with respect to setting up a task force and studying the matter for one year, with the assistance or involvement of people in other levels of government. This was a ministerial commitment and we felt that perhaps what was needed was a government commitment. I know that the proceedings of the standing committee are on record, but I wonder if the minister would clarify whether his commitment was a government commitment rather than just a ministerial commitment, because ministers come and go but governments last a little longer. So perhaps he might indicate to us at this time that it was a government commitment which he gave to us in the standing committee.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before calling on the Minister for Public Works (Mr. Cosgrove), I must warn the House that if the minister speaks now he will close the debate.

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, I just have a couple of quick observations, one of which is prompted by an article which appeared in *The Citizen* of yesterday, in the editorial pages, referring to "Cosgrove, Friend of the Cities".