

*Opportunities for Youth Program*

Shortly before the conference was to be held, the federal government indicated it was not yet ready to discuss its plans with regard to young people for this summer. So, the Canadian Council on Social Development willingly deferred the conference until early March.

Within a few days of that postponed date in early March, the government indicated to the Council that it would not participate and, secondly, that it would not lend financial support, effectively torpedoing that national conference on Canadian youth. That is the extent to which the government is prepared to move out beyond its own borders and discuss realistically the many problems related to youth, summer employment, summer travel and so on. It must have demanded a considerable amount of courage, even on the part of this government to scuttle effectively that kind of conference not once but twice.

I suspect the reason the government was not prepared to participate in the conference in early March was that it had nothing useful to say, and it wanted as few people as possible to know that fact. But the government has said it was consulting with the provinces, that in all of these matters it was going to have the fullest kind of consultation with each and every province. It must seem strange that many of the provinces, whom we were told were consulted, are now so publicly asking the same kinds of questions and making the same kind of criticisms as members have been asking and making in this House for many weeks. The government spoke of broad consultation in the preparation of youth programs with provincial governments. We see the results of that kind of consultation. There is no youth hostel in Montreal at the moment and there are complaints from various provinces about projects that have not been funded. There is the whole question of whether the federal government should be supporting the legal and now illegal hitchhiking that has been encouraged. It is very clear, Mr. Speaker, that what consultation means to this government is some kind of form letter or notification. What they need is a first hand understanding of the very meaning of consultation itself.

• (3:20 p.m.)

It has grown increasingly obvious, as this program has unfolded, that this government has real problems in understanding young people. I do not know where most of their information comes from. I do not know with whom they have entered into consultation, but their information does not seem to have much bearing on the young people of this country. Further, their obvious inability to understand the regional character of this country, its indigenous concerns and aspirations, makes me wonder whether they can see 50 yards beyond their bureaucratic desks. Much of what this government has attempted to do and say about young people shows an arrogance that is not at all appealing or encouraging to those who believe that there is a productive and creative role for young people to play with authorities, federal, provincial or municipal. In the months ahead, Mr. Speaker, I think this government will have to find a good deal

[Mr. MacDonald (Egmont).]

many answers with regard to its so-called understanding and consultation with and about youth.

What kind of consultation has existed with regard to projects that have been rejected, for instance? As early as last May 11, before a final decision had been reached on acceptance of any program, I asked the Secretary of State (Mr. Pelletier) the following question, which appears at page 5681 of *Hansard*:

Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact that the minister has now acknowledged that the vast majority of projects will not be accepted under the Opportunities for Youth program—

That is when he indicated there were well over 10,000 projects.

—will he indicate whether steps are being taken to consult with other bodies including municipal and provincial governments and independent agencies such as universities and industries to determine whether some of the more imaginative and important programs can even yet be implemented with their assistance?

That was five weeks ago, Mr. Speaker. The Secretary of State replied:

Mr. Speaker, I was surprised to hear the hon. member for Egmont talk about that in his reply to my statement on motions—

I had mentioned this earlier when I spoke on motions that day.

—and I am now to hear him raise the matter again in a question, because it has been established for weeks—I had the opportunity to mention it many times—that the secretariat of Opportunities for Youth would not consider a refusal as final—

That is as clear as it can be. He said to us that day that Opportunities for Youth would not consider a refusal as final but would rather try, as it is already doing with regard to projects that it cannot finance entirely, to find other sources of financing and other ways of implementing such projects through private industry or the various levels of government. What kind of sham and hollow answer is that, Mr. Speaker, when all across the country individuals who have submitted programs are receiving a form letter headed "Regarding", which gives the name and the number of the project and then states that 2,400 projects have been accepted. The last paragraph, which is a real humdinger, reads as follows:

We have learned much of the ambition, needs and concerns of Canadian youth through this first Opportunities for Youth program and our analysis of your proposal has contributed to this evaluation.

I realize that it will be of small consolation to you to be assured that your efforts have not gone without benefit. But I wish nevertheless to thank you for your interest and your contribution in responding to Opportunities for Youth.

That is the kind of activity in which the government will be engaged with regard to assisting worthy projects to be financed, either by private enterprise, industry, universities or other levels of government. One does not like to make judgments about the honesty of individuals in this chamber, Mr. Speaker, so I shall refrain and let the facts speak for themselves. A government that believes in meaningful consultation? Nonsense! A government that is willing to take the vast majority of projects which it can not fund and actively try to negotiate