

Mr. Stevens: I come from a riding which has had many problems over the years concerning winter works programs. Those problems are largely ones of not having sufficient lead time. This House should consider the possibility, and I emphasize that the government should consider this, of setting up a much more workable mechanism to ensure that the municipalities, the provinces and the federal government can plan ahead year by year in respect of what funds may be available from time to time for this type of approach.

In saying that, however, I should like to emphasize that it is totally unacceptable for the Minister of Finance and for the hon. member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Poulin) to, in effect, say that parliament should delegate the direction of that on-going program to the public service. It is important that we keep control of the current year's expenditures in this House. I would suggest, and in this I think perhaps the hon. member for Timiskaming (Mr. Peters) is in agreement, that it is absolutely essential these funds be administered in a way that will be of maximum advantage to the municipalities and provinces concerned in this country.

If you take a look at the vote itself, you will see there are certainly some unanswered questions. For example, you will find that, while most members have referred to this as being a three-year program involving \$350 million, the fact is the vote does not make it clear that the \$350 million will be spread over three years. Our Minister of Finance has indicated that this year he feels the top amount which may be expended will be \$75 million; next year, he thinks it might be \$170 million, and the following year \$105 million.

While the minister will not answer our questions concerning what rate of unemployment he finds acceptable, perhaps we can use as a barometer the fact that there are 688,000 people out of work today, and he anticipates substantially more unemployed next winter because he suggests there will be more than twice as much money used from this fund next winter. Let me emphasize that there is nothing to prevent the government, through the Minister of Finance, expending the entire \$350 million within two years. There is no guarantee that this amount is going to be spread over three years, and I think the House should understand that.

When the hon. member for Ottawa Centre and the Minister of Finance continue to say that all we are talking about is a loan and that we are going to have a chance to speak later on expenditures when we decide how much is to be forgiven, I think they are taking an extremely legalistic approach. Rather than our group presenting legalisms, I believe if you read his evidence given before the committee which considered this matter, you will find that the Minister of Finance was extremely legalistic in his approach.

Mr. Baldwin: What a great slush fund it would be in an election.

Mr. Stevens: I would also point out that the wording of vote L12a has some small print. It sets out the various amounts of the \$350 million that will be apportioned to the provinces, and then it provides that if the provincial ministers indicate in writing they will not use a portion of any

Supply

allotted amount, that amount may be allotted to other provinces. I feel this is not a decision which should be left in the hands of civil servants.

The hon. member for Ottawa Centre, and I agree with him, has great confidence in public servants. However, I believe they must be given direction and leadership because this government is more in the hands of civil servants than directing them.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stevens: Another thing that worries me a great deal about this vote is the fact that it will really be the wealthier municipalities and provinces that will get to the trough first in order to make use of the funds made available. I say that because if you read paragraph (b) in the vote you will notice a covenant is required from a province or a municipality. There may be small municipalities or smaller provinces which will find that, because of their own peculiar financing problems, they will not be in a position to take advantage of these funds to the extent that the more wealthier municipalities and provinces will. This I feel is one reason that, rather than having this type of approach, it would be more satisfactory to work out an on-going conference-like arrangement with the provinces and municipalities to make sure that the funds available, \$75 million if you like this year, will in fact be available to the municipalities that need it most.

I am afraid that under the present wording of this vote the reverse will be true, and the wealthier municipalities and provinces with relatively low debts will be able to make the fastest and greatest use of these funds.

Mr. Stanfield: The same old gang.

Mr. Stevens: For example, in my own area, it is not the larger municipalities that have the greatest difficulty. I spoke to the chairman of York Region who pointed out that, although they have a great number on staff, they find it difficult to meet the deadlines generally set concerning winter works programs. He pointed out that if this is so at the regional level it is particularly so at the lower level where you are dealing with small towns or townships which do not have the staff to cope with the amount of red tape which is usually generated prior to one of these grants being approved.

I feel a much more satisfactory program has to be worked out by the government and accepted by this parliament. I am really puzzled as to why the government has chosen this approach. Oddly enough, there is reference in the vote to an existing act, namely the Municipal Development and Loan Act. I suggest that before we go too far in voting the \$350 million suggested figure, those in this House should take a look at the Municipal Development and Loan Act, particularly Section 30 thereof, which set up in 1966 a process that could easily be amended to give effect to that which the government is proposing here today.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, when one begins to read that act I believe it gives one a few clues concerning why this vote L12a has been proposed in this form. You will notice that section 13 refers to a limit being placed on the amount which should be used for this type of activity. There is a