

*Opportunities for Youth Program*

acknowledged. I am not saying that any of these programs necessarily met the criteria, but I am concerned at the lack of equal opportunity to which the rural areas have been subjected. There was absolutely no provision made for notification and the disclosure of information.

There were many other administrative problems. Despite the official policy, the impression was created that the deadline would be extended. Very few people knew exactly when the deadline was. The Manpower offices did not have the information simply because it was not given to them. There were, of course, no representatives of Opportunities for Youth in western Canada. They were all in Ottawa. Apparently the offices in Ottawa were in a state of chaos. Phone calls went unanswered as well as letters of inquiry. Officials were often not in their offices and information was simply impossible to obtain. Probably the most crucial information necessary was the least obtainable; that is the very criterion necessary for acceptance of one's program. Once again, I must repeat that the office staff must not be blamed. It seems that they have tried their best under an impossible situation. I can only say that the government must be blamed for not recognizing the situation as it really existed.

In one instance of which I am aware, several commerce students from the University of Manitoba, on extremely short notice, managed to formulate a program for Opportunities for Youth. Needless to say, their project was rejected. However, they did not receive formal notification. One of the students had to telephone several times from Winnipeg at his own expense to be told that the project was unacceptable. The object of the project was very intriguing in itself. It was to teach native people who were living in Winnipeg business practice and accounting. Some citizen in Winnipeg had generously donated \$10,000 in equipment to set up a business organization to be run by Indian people after they had been trained by the commerce students. However, it was this connection with private enterprise which was the fatal blow to the project. It seems to me that this project was worthwhile in its intent, Mr. Speaker, but because of a lack of flexibility and an arbitrary policy, it was doomed.

I also know of projects at Berens River and Fort Alexander which involved native people which were also dismissed summarily. Probably one of the greatest complaints that I have received, Mr. Speaker, has been that many projects were rejected for no given reason. Financing seemed to be taken into account instead of the merit of the project. One project in Winnipeg apparently allotted approximately \$135,000 for wages, but absolutely no funds for administration. The province of Manitoba had to step in to make up the difference. The general feeling among those who submitted projects was that there should have been an opportunity for personal representations to the selection committee on the merits of the projects. Many people felt that their particular project had merit and that it met the necessary requirements, yet was dismissed without reason. There is a good reason for the fact that the number of projects which came in this year was so great the minister's office could not

[Mr. Murta.]

handle them, but these recommendations or suggestions should be taken into account for a youth program for another year.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I received an inquiry from an organization in my constituency about the status of a submission it had made. They had received no notification on whether their program was accepted or rejected. My office was in contact with the Opportunities for Youth office, but no information could be obtained. We were assured that 99 per cent of those accepted had received notification, but there was no estimate of the number of rejections yet to be mailed. At least these people are entitled to a reply. I know for a fact that the organization from my constituency to which I am referring was still counting on an acceptance of their proposal on June 11. My office had to contact these people and tell them that in all likelihood their plan was rejected.

The Canadian people should know, Mr. Speaker, how these funds are going to be allotted. According to some official in the Opportunities for Youth office, that information is classified. No figures would be given on the basis of a province by province breakdown. Such an attitude only breeds suspicion. It certainly raises my suspicions. Could it be that the funds were not distributed equally throughout the country? This is something which comes to mind, and I can only say that this is what has happened, unless the parliamentary secretary is able to allay my fears. I challenge the government to make these figures public and dispel my fears. Otherwise, as far as I am concerned, these accusations must be taken seriously.

I am also doubtful as to whether or not enough care was taken in the selection of projects. We read newspaper articles on political patronage in the distribution of funds at McGill University, charges of misappropriation of funds in Toronto, and even a project in B.C. where \$9,000 was granted but is being used for growing marijuana. I, personally, have heard of one case in Toronto where a project was accepted but is being supported by funds from both the Opportunities for Youth Program and the Ontario government.

There was much wrong with the Opportunities for Youth program. It failed to provide the cash needed to finance further education. In fact, many students who find it necessary to earn and save over \$1,000 during the summer, such as those students from the rural areas, were disqualified and had to try for higher paying jobs. There was no selection on the basis of need. Many people who have received funds are not in need of money. I can only say that this hastily conceived program missed the point, which is to provide hard cash through rewarding work, money which is necessary for thousands of students if they wish to continue their education.

• (5:10 p.m.)

I suggest to the government that it begin planning for next year now. Promotion of any programs such as this in the future should begin well in advance of their implementation. Perhaps the funds should be allotted to