

Supply

in certain areas. Unlike the hon. member for Timiskaming I do have great confidence in the public servants of this country who are going to be asked to administer these projects should this vote be approved by the House.

• (1530)

I do not think it is the obligation, or indeed the duty and responsibility, of this House to write contracts entered into between the provincial governments and this government. Sufficient be it that the program is outlined in specific enough detail so that we can honestly and accurately appraise it and see that it is indeed for the benefit of the people of the country in the area it is intended to assist.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner), in his remarks both before the Standing Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates and in the House yesterday, indicated that following consultations with the various ministers of finance across the country, agreements were entered upon which would be reduced to contract form indicating the rights and obligations of the provinces in the event that they do take the amount of money that would be theirs if this appropriation is approved.

It seemed to me that some members of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition appeared to agree in principle that this project is worthwhile and of benefit to the nation, specifically in areas that suffer from a great deal of unemployment. They felt that unemployment should be alleviated as quickly and efficiently as possible in every and all such areas. However, notwithstanding that fact, they seemed to get caught up in a legalistic argument in order to defeat this vote, thus preventing the provinces, in co-operation with the federal government, from making global plans over the course of the next two to three years in regard to on-going projects that would ensure, so far as is possible, the alleviation of unemployment in those areas.

The hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) had something to say about section 20 of the Financial Administration Act. He said that section 20 of the act makes illegal what this vote is attempting to do. This vote is attempting to place money in the hands of the provinces for worthwhile winter works projects. It is within the competence of this parliament to pass a law to this effect, thus providing funds for on-going projects, not just in this fiscal year but also in ensuing fiscal years.

Yesterday in his remarks the Minister of Finance mentioned many precedents that had been created over the years—precedents that in my submission to Your Honour become part of the law of the land—whereby the very same vehicle has been used to provide funds for worthwhile projects beyond the specific fiscal year in which they were voted. Indeed, the Minister of Finance referred to the same procedure being used during the period when the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) was leader of the government. Surely, those precedents which were legal and which were followed at that time are no less legal today.

I suggest that attempting to bring forward in this House this kind of legalistic argument so as to defeat or to delay the passage of a vote that is needed immediately in order to ensure that the program gets underway at the earliest possible moment is unworthy of the hon. member's previ-

[Mr. Poulin.]

ous actions, and indeed his many other fine and worthwhile submissions to the House.

The objectives of this program are to bring about an increase in capital spending in order to sustain a high level of employment, particularly during the winter and especially in those areas of the country where there is at the present time, and where there can be anticipated to be in ensuing winters, a high level of unemployment. If we are to deny to the provinces and municipalities the financial means to plan, over a sufficiently lengthy period of time, on-going winter works projects, then we are not doing our duty in this House. We should make financially possible all the winter works we can in order to alleviate the high unemployment existing in some areas of this country.

Guidelines and administrative procedures have been set down to administer funds if parliament votes such funds. These guidelines are easily understood and can be easily administered by public servants. When each year the forgiveness clause contained in this vote comes before a parliamentary committee for approval, and before parliament itself, I understand, hon. members will have an opportunity to examine it in detail and either grant or not grant forgiveness of the loan, in accordance with the contract with the province or municipality concerned. As I understand it, what we are asking parliament at this time to do is not to spend money but rather to authorize a loan. According to my interpretation of section 20 of the Financial Administration Act, authorization of a loan in this fiscal year is not an expenditure. As the Minister of Finance clearly demonstrated, it is only upon the operation of the forgiveness feature that there is an expenditure in that fiscal year.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, in my submission the legalistic argument that has been raised really carries no weight whatsoever. It attempts only to detract, and to some extent does detract, unnecessarily from the most worthwhile objectives of this program. I would urge the members of this House to join with me and vote for this item in its entirety, thus providing to provinces and municipalities \$350 million to enable them to plan long-range projects to aid in alleviating unemployment in this country.

Mr. Sinclair Stevens (York-Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, in rising to speak on the matter which is before us I should like to make it clear, particularly with reference to the comments made by the hon. member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Poulin), that what we are suggesting is that rather than voting \$350 million at this stage the amount should be \$75 million. I point out that this amount is actually the amount the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) indicated would likely be the top amount to be spent by this government in the current year. This House should always remember that we in the Progressive Conservative party, and certainly I personally, believe that the on-going program should be put on a more practical basis than is being proposed at the present time in this House.

• (1540)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!