

Adjournment Debate

I should like to ask whether the minister intends to make an early statement outlining the reasons behind the abandonment by his department of youth programs.

The minister replied:

Mr. Speaker, there has been no abandonment by my department of youth programs, and I think the hon. member knows that. I think what he really wants to know is when an announcement will be made about the student summer employment program.

Then he went on to say a few things about which I did not ask him. I retorted:

In view of the fact that after two years there has been no youth report and the Opportunities for Youth Program is about to be transferred to the Department of Manpower and Immigration and therefore there is no youth policy or program, will the minister please indicate whether the problems in this regard have to do with in-fighting in his department, incompetence on the part of the minister or both?

Of course, the question was ruled out of order by the Speaker and rightly so. I had intended to debate this matter on December 20 and was informed that I could do so during the adjournment debate that evening. But at about 5.30 that day I had a rush call from the minister's office with a request to postpone any debate, on the ground that since I had implied that the Secretary of State might be incompetent, the minister asserted that he should have the right to debate the charge personally and, further, that since the minister was being married that day he could hardly be expected to be in the House to debate the question with me between 10 and 10.30 that evening. Naturally, Mr. Speaker, being a reasonable, understanding and even humane man I could easily appreciate that the minister should be given an opportunity to rebut personally any charge of incompetence, and therefore I readily agreed to the postponement until tonight. Besides, no one would want to be accused of incompetence, especially on his wedding night. That charge could be made, however, but it would be most indelicate emanating from one who is a disinterested bystander in the nuptials or, at the very most, whose interest exists at arm's length.

The motive behind my question is relatively simple. I have been concerned for some time about what has been going on or, more accurately, what is not going on within the Department of the Secretary of State. We have, of course, all heard the rumour that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) advised a lower profile for the Department of the Secretary of State on the ground that some of its programs were controversial and were making the natives restless, which reflected unfavourably on the electoral acceptance of the government. But a lower profile is one thing; retrenchment or outright oblivion is another. I think it is eminently fair for me to say that since the present minister took over the department, not one single major new initiative has been undertaken. On the contrary, many have been cut back.

I should like to give a few examples. The Opportunities for Youth Program has been scuttled and shuffled off to Manpower. The assistant deputy minister has been assigned to Museums. He did not realize he was that old. There has been no announcement of a new assistant deputy minister: I suppose it might be one of the gold-dust twins of the department, either Mr. McCabe or Mr. Ostry. By the way, when discussing these two gentlemen I never knew for sure which was the organ-grinder and which one

[Mr. Rose.]

was the monkey; but Mr. Ostry has gone and we have had no announcement of a new ADM for that department.

The evaluation of the summer youth employment program has never been completed, in spite of the fact that the Secretary of State took it over, which is probably not much worse than the previous year's Treasury Board evaluation which was buried and has never seen the light of day.

Fourth, there is no word about the hostel program from that department. The Minister of the Environment (Mr. Davis), instead of the Secretary of State, seems to be reporting for the CBC. Fifth, half the travelling exchange budget is going to a private agency called World Canada Youth which is about to be abandoned, I understand, by the Department of the Secretary of State after having been carried for two years. Why was it accepted in the first place, and when will the minister table the report on the World Canada Youth project the publication of which, by the way, I understand is now 2½ months late? Finally, where is the much-touted national youth policy which, I would suggest, should have been the natural and logical outgrowth of the million-dollar David Hunter study of Canada's youth problem some three years ago?

I could go on and on listing the failures of this department as to film policy, museum policy and human rights or even educational support. I do not have the time for that. But the inescapable fact is that there has been either a major policy shift within the Department of the Secretary of State or a non-policy of drift and retrenchment. In either case, what the House needs from the Secretary of State is a frank and open, to the point statement about where he is going. I for one—and I am sure other hon. members will agree with me—find his evasiveness intolerable and unacceptable. When I ask him a question, as I did in my original question of December 7, I do not want to be corrected in superior tones regarding a question that I did not really ask; I want an answer. I insist that it is time a statement came from that department.

Mr. Joseph-Philippe Guay (St. Boniface): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has, of course, ranged far afield from his original motion under Standing Order 43 and his original oral question. I would like to point out to the hon. member that youth programming by the Department of the Secretary of State and by the government has certainly not been abandoned.

The hon. member seems to view youth as a special class of citizens, a class which has interests which concern only one department. I should like to reaffirm that the government believes that young people are an integral part of society and that their concerns are much the same as those of other age groups in Canada. For this very reason we have initiated programs such as OFY, LIP and New Horizons which in essence open the federal treasury to groups of individuals who wish to devote time and effort to their communities. Opportunities for Youth was one of a number of employment and activities programs undertaken by the government to cope with a situation with which the private sector of the economy was unable to deal, namely, the vast number of students who join the labour force during the summer months.