

Government Orders

The Deputy Chairman: On debate, the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

Mr. Heap: Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the New Democratic Party I would support and, if it is appropriate, second the motion of Mr. Marchi.

I believe that during the eighties, and particularly during the tenure of this government since 1984, there has been progress toward recognizing the need for a wider exercise of responsibility in the standing and special committees of Parliament. This has been reflected in the McGrath reforms. Because of this, for example, the present Standing Committee on Labour, Employment and Immigration did a study of the backlog program to help focus attention on and get some clear definition of some of the problems that existed then, most of which still exist.

• (1240)

It would be very useful if the act made quite clear that the committee is also empowered to review and examine the use made of these moneys advanced and to ask from time to time that the minister and the officials report to the committee on those matters. It is not enough to wait until the Estimates at the end of each year. Too much water can go under the bridge, as has already been shown by the government in this very matter. We should have had a report last fall, or at least at the beginning of this year. Placing this into the act would remind the minister, the officials, and the committee that we have a duty to make sure that this loan fund is working the way the minister, the officials, and Parliament as a whole intended that it should.

Therefore, I would hope that no difficulty would be found with it by the government side.

Mr. Kempling: Mr. Chairman, we do not find too much fault with the thrust of the amendment that the hon. member has put forward.

The reality is that this is, first, covered by our Standing Orders and, second, covered by section 119(4) of the act. It would appear to be redundant. We do not find it an offensive amendment. It is a matter of having the same thing three times—in the act, the Standing Orders, and through an amendment. I just question whether it is wise to proceed in this manner when it is already taken care of in the statute.

Would the hon. member like to comment on that?

Mr. Marchi: Mr. Chairman, I was listening to the parliamentary secretary and I was also trying to listen to the parliamentary secretary to the government House Leader. They are suggesting that perhaps there is some redundancy here. A very quick reading the portion of the act that was indicated to me I thought suggested a review of the previous moneys expended.

The purpose of my amendment was to have a somewhat more elaborate process so that, either through an annual report or a report to the committee of the previous month's expenditures, we have a somewhat more elaborate assurance that the committee may, in fact, engage the minister and/or her officials in a discussion as to where things sit for the coming months and the coming fiscal year so that we can see where the demands are coming from. In that way, we will not simply have a review mirroring the reading of the situation because we are removing it from the legislative stream of things.

Therefore, the purpose of my amendment was to ensure that in the future the committee and its members have some degree of knowledge and say with the minister as to how these moneys will be changed or spent. Before, when there was need for an amendment, at least one had in advance the reasons for the amendment. One would know that they would want to increase from 150 to 200 because that is the number of people who had requested it. These are the numbers of applicants. There was a rationale behind it.

I believe that the existing portions of the act which I read very quickly would provide for more of an updating as to what has happened as opposed to what will happen or could happen in a given situation. At this stage I would still like to pursue the relevancy of the amendment I offered.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Chairman, I am looking at the section of the act as well as the amendment that has been proposed by the hon. member. I think I have a sense of what he is trying to accomplish. I am just not sure that his amendment would not, in fact, undermine a little bit of what he is trying to accomplish.

I want to read the specific section of the act. Section 119(4) reads:

The Minister shall, within six months following the commencement of each fiscal year or, if Parliament is not then sitting, within the first fifteen days next thereafter that either House of Parliament is sitting, cause to be laid before Parliament a report