

Opportunities for Youth Program

I mentioned that communities are being driven apart by the growing welfare rolls contributed to by the number of young people unemployed and the fact that even with the Opportunities for Youth program, there is really not enough to take care of the needs. There is a growing resentment on the part of the working poor against supporting welfare programs. We hear increasingly strident cries about bums on welfare. This situation is often aided and abetted by some demagogic politicians. Work for welfare schemes are increasingly tantalizing, and would be amusing if they were not so tragic. If we can supply a person with employment after he has been forced to go on public assistance, why can we not supply that person with a job before he is forced to take this step so degrading to human dignity?

The latest case is the Surrey strawberry harvest. Part of this area is in the constituency which I represent. The Surrey municipal council has voted to deny social assistance to 349 employable recipients as of June 1. These people will be told to either pick strawberries or starve. I remind hon. members that this is not California or Texas where cheap wetback labour is used to subsidize a fruit and vegetable business. This is right here in Canada. The point is not whether this proposal is legal, it is not, and under the Canada Assistance Plan the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Munro), if he showed some intestinal fortitude, could cut off the 50 per cent federal contribution because of this violation. The point is that in my opinion, this move by the Surrey Council, which is supported by the majority of Surrey residents, because it is grappling with its frustrations over mounting welfare costs, would never have been attempted under other circumstances. They would not get public support. The result of this deliberate policy of unemployment has been to divide the community and force the working poor to attack another deprived group.

● (3:50 p.m.)

I should like, now, to repeat some of the things I and other speakers have said about the Opportunities for Youth program and also to ask a number of questions which I believe to be germane. There has been considerable criticism directed toward the administration of the program. Attention has been called to the delay in disseminating application forms. The original announcement was made on March 16 but I found from my own investigation that by March 23 the appropriate forms had still not reached the New Westminster manpower office, so groups in my area were unable to apply as early as they wished. This is an example of extremely sloppy administration or else of a very hastily conceived program. We have heard and read about the delay in granting approval. There was, of course, a flood of applications, a mountain of applications—the money allotted could have been spent ten times over, we have been told.

So there was delay in evaluating submitted project applications. I can fully sympathize with the office staff who have been so overloaded. A better system should be worked out in future years. Then again, groups have found great difficulty about obtaining appointments with

[Mr. Rose.]

approving bodies to see or talk to anyone in the office. I can say that Members of Parliament have experienced great difficulty in getting information from the local office. The whole thing adds up to a whopping mess. I do not lay the blame on the shoulders of those who are working in the various offices and struggling with the heavy workload. The delay in sending out cheques in respect of projects already approved has caused difficulty and delay also.

All responsibility for this frustration and chaos can be laid squarely at the door of the cabinet. Why was the announcement delayed until March 15? After all, the program depended upon the imagination and initiative and innovative qualities of the students themselves. Why was it not announced in December? One can only guess. Was provincial approval withheld? Was the government afraid it would have another CYC on its hands? Anyway, this announcement delay was the principal cause in my view of all the difficulties which followed and responsibility for it has to be laid squarely before the Secretary of State (Mr. Pelletier) and the cabinet.

Regardless of the competence or incompetence of the office dealing with the program, the difficulties of the staff have been multiplied by the pressure under which they have been obliged to work, the mountains of applications flowing in because of the late announcement coupled with an inhumanly early closing deadline. The prime responsibility for poor administration, poor public relations work and indifferent communications rests with the government. There is no escaping blame for this. We are seeing here another example of the government's mismanagement, of an ad hoc approach and of general bungling. The beneficiaries have been the young people of Canada—the beneficiaries of the bungling, that is.

Second, I should like to know whose fatheaded decision it was that, in order to be approved, all projects had to be entirely student-conceived, that they had to be of short duration, forming no part of an existing or on-going program operated by a municipal government, or an agency or organization with competence and experience in working with youth, such as the YMCA. I am only guessing about the criteria used when assessing these applications. I have never seen them published. Everything seems to operate in the dark. No reason for rejecting an application is given. Applicants receive a polite "No" and often not even that. But the restrictions I have mentioned appear to constitute a basic defect in the program. Why could not at least some of the funds available, possibly half, have been used to extend the work of agencies which normally employ youth. This would have been an eminently sensible move and one likely to lead to a much more efficient use of the funds available. Surely, the government has had sufficient experience with the CYC to have learned the value of some structure, of some assurance that there would be responsibility and accountability.

I shall not discuss individual projects at this time, though I have seen some interesting examples, including that of the application by three students for a grant of \$3,000 in order to study techniques in group meditation. I