

*Urban Affairs—Budget Forecast*

● (1710)

I am worried about the assumption which I believe was implicit in the remarks of government spokesmen in the past that if you give members of parliament too much information they will cause damage with it or if you give them too much information they will be up to some mischief. The result is that this is a very pessimistic and unnecessary judgment of human nature. I, perhaps, am overly naïve as a new member of this House, but it is just possible that if members of parliament were given more material on which to base their contributions in these committee meetings, they would be more objective and therefore would be less the product of partisan political judgments upon which, in the absence of real material to base a case, a member must fall back. I suggest to the government that it may very well be in its long-run interest to be a little less stingy with papers prepared by the public service.

I suggest it would be very useful if the government were to re-examine its entire policy in this regard and take a look at the basis upon which it is denying the House documents which have gone into the formulation of its policies. It should ask itself seriously whether every piece of paper in the ministry must be stamped "confidential". Other jurisdictions have operated with a very great degree of latitude in respect of the publication of internal documents and have survived. We know for a fact in two jurisdictions I have examined, namely Switzerland and Sweden, a far more, if I may use the term, liberal attitude toward publication of papers has prevailed for some time. It may or may not be coincidental that the government of Sweden which introduced this policy has managed to survive in office for 40 years, although I concede it is in a very close situation at the present time.

It is part of the underlying philosophy of the creation of public policy in Switzerland that the citizens of that republic shall be provided with all the information necessary to come to an educated conclusion about protecting government policy which is not directly amenable to the interest of maximum security. In the case specifically of the Department of Urban Affairs, I may note that the production of some more material would have been particularly useful in permitting members to come to some conclusions concerning the very extensive amendments to the National Housing Act which were passed by this House. Some more useful light might have been shed upon the bill which passed this House a day or two ago. At a time when housing policy is undergoing massive re-evaluation right across the country at all levels of government, I think it would have been in the interest of creative public policy for the ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to have given this House more background material than it did.

Indeed, I may say this comment might very well apply to the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation and to the vast array of bureaucracy which administers federal housing policy. It is extremely difficult to find out precisely upon what criteria its conclusions are based. I think the public, on the whole, is not served by an obsession about privacy in the matter of public papers. I urge that the spokesman for the government reconsider what has been in the past an automatic and instinctive negative response

[Mr. Grier.]

to reasoned requests such as the one I make in my notice of motion for the production of papers.

**Mr. Ian Watson (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of State for Urban Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Toronto-Lakeshore (Mr. Grier) is asking for the production of the 1973-74 program forecast for the Ministry of Urban Affairs so that by scrutinizing the A, B and X budgets of the ministry he will have more information than he feels he now has available to him. I have a great deal of sympathy with the member's desire for more information. Certainly, it is my feeling that over the longer run members of parliament must be furnished with more information on all aspects of government than we now have available to us, regardless of party. I can assure the hon. member, however, that there is no desire to keep him or any other member of the House uninformed about the important activities of the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs. An examination of the A, B and X budgets of the ministry would tell something about the ministry's program.

In the case of the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs the blue book, the main estimates, provides a very clear and concise picture of what the ministry is involved in. And I would remind the House that the minister of State for Urban Affairs (Mr. Basford) was prepared to go before the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs this spring to explain, in detail, the activities of the ministry and the imaginative program it is evolving. Members of the committee, however, chose to study and debate other subjects.

I think we should recall at this juncture that the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs is just over two years old. It was created by proclamation of the House of Commons on July 10, 1971. It is a new ministry, with new activities and new staff, but it is making its mark on the urban situation in Canada. The ministry is, and intends to remain, a small, compact, highly responsive federal agency. And its budget for 1973-74 is not large by the standards of other departments, generally speaking. The estimated expenditures for 1973-74 are \$17,020,000. It is very important that all of us have a very clear picture of what a policy ministry is, what it does and what its specific application is in the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs.

Ministries of state were, and are, intended to develop new, comprehensive and innovative federal policies in areas where such policies are of great urgency and importance. And I hardly need remind you how important urban Canada is for our society and our economy. Most of us live in cities. And the fortunes of most of us are decided by how our cities fare. The Ministry of State for Urban Affairs, then, has three major responsibilities. It is to formulate and develop policies by which the federal government can influence the urbanization process, urban growth if you will; it is to achieve the integration of urban policies with the other policies and programs of the federal government, and it is to develop co-operative relationships in urban matters with the provinces and through them with the municipalities, as well as with the public and private organizations.