

*Oral Questions*

gram funds was spent in Liberal ridings. Of course that was confirmed when the list was tabled.

Yet another source in the Minister's Department tells me that on Monday, February 20, of this week, a directive went out to all regional offices saying that all inquiries from Members of Parliament about the program should be routed to the Minister's office to a Mary Jamieson. Why the gag order? What is the Minister afraid of? Does he no longer have any confidence in his own officials?

**Hon. John Roberts (Minister of Employment and Immigration):** No, Mr. Speaker, I am not afraid of anything, particularly the questions of the Hon. Member. He asks about a directive that went out to civil servants suggesting that calls be directed to my office, he said, I think, on Monday of this week. I believe that probably such a directive was sent out before that, and its purpose was to ensure that queries about this program, which was obviously a matter of great interest and also political controversy, came to my office rather than be responded to directly by civil servants. The reason for that is that if civil servants began to respond directly on these matters it would be very easy for their comments to be taken out of context and used as part of the political battle, which is not their responsibility.

Indeed, I have seen on some occasions, in questions posed by Members on the other side of the House, that they have raised questions based on discussions that they have had with officials and which, when I investigated, did not seem to correspond entirely to the facts as the officials described them to me.

It is a natural part of the political process that the programs of the Government are advocated and defended by the Members of the Government, and the function of civil servants is not to take part in that controversy, nor should their words be used as part of that controversy. That is why that directive was given.

## DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS TO SASKATCHEWAN RIDINGS

**Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister has said several times that he spends money from his Department on the basis of the unemployment rate in order to try to create jobs for Canadians. Could he explain why, in my Province of Saskatchewan, the riding of Assiniboia with a 2.4 per cent unemployment rate received \$736,000, while the riding of Prince Albert with a 7.5 per cent unemployment rate received only \$50,000? Why did Prince Albert, with three times more unemployed, receive only one fifteenth of the money that went into the Assiniboia riding?

**An Hon. Member:** Tell us about Ralph Goodale.

**Hon. John Roberts (Minister of Employment and Immigration):** Mr. Speaker, to be precise, I never said that the allocations were based strictly on the unemployment levels. I said that if you look at the proportion of expenditure, they correspond pretty well.

As a matter of fact, in the Hon. Member's home Province, where we have no Members of Parliament at all to the best of my recollection, 2.6 per cent of the funds have been spent in Saskatchewan, and the percentage of Canadian unemployed that is to be found in Saskatchewan is 2.6 per cent, exactly the same.

The reason why one cannot look simply at the figures of expenditure and look at those proportions in relation to unemployment insurance is that there are many other programs of the Government over-all which deal with unemployment problems, apart from these. For instance, there are the incentives given in the last Budget which stimulate economic activity through private sector activity in our economy. Naturally those have a greater impact on some Provinces than on others. There are some Provinces that are wealthier than others, indeed including the Province of Saskatchewan, where one would expect that the provincial Governments would be able to do more in combating unemployment than in some of the Provinces that are not so well off. One should not look for an exact parallel in the percentages. I said that if you look at the unemployment percentages and the proportions of expenditure you will find that there is a rough comparison which makes sense.

**Mr. Nystrom:** That is a pretty rough comparison.

## FUNDS ALLOCATED TO ASSINIBOIA RIDING

**Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville):** Assiniboia has one-third the unemployment rate of Prince Albert, yet it is given fifteen times as much money as Prince Albert. Mr. Speaker, we are lucky enough not to have any Liberal MPs, but could the Minister tell us if the reason Assiniboia got so much money is due to the fact that Senator Argue, better known as "Senator Slushfund" in our Province, comes from the Assiniboia constituency, and that the former Member of Parliament from that riding, Ralph Goodale, who is now the Leader of the Liberal Party in Saskatchewan, is running for election to the provincial Legislature in the riding of Assiniboia?

**Hon. John Roberts (Minister of Employment and Immigration):** Mr. Speaker, obviously the hon. gentleman does not listen to me, or does not care to hear. Two point six per cent of the funds have gone to Saskatchewan, and 2.6 per cent of the unemployment in Canada is to be found in Saskatchewan.

**Mr. Nystrom:** Answer the question.

**Mr. Roberts:** The hon. gentleman is concerned about Assiniboia. I will pass on to Senator Argue his comments that the New Democratic Party does not want funds spent in Assiniboia to create jobs.