

Regional Economic Expansion

before of thinking about complex questions before making a judgment.

It has become an art to follow the events so as to give valid opinions on vital issues for the electorate as for its representatives. Those who asked questions expect quick and wise answers on the part of Parliament members on many subjects which concern the community, such as fiscal matters, economic matters which are becoming more and more disturbing and also on local topics which are increasing in number and difficulty.

Specifically, we have people asking why a co-operative flour-mill which contributes to provide jobs and boost the economic growth of an area cannot benefit from DREE grants to upgrade its equipment and offer new products to the public when a hotel such as the one mentioned in the motion can benefit from the act. Are products or services offered to the public more useful than those of a co-operative flour-mill?

Why can that same department financially help a business and not another? People will say that the act is the governing criterion. There are also regulations edicted under the act but they are made by officials and not members of parliament; that procedure is a deficiency which prevents members of parliament from fulfilling their role to the fullest extent.

A parliamentarian often needs information on delicate questions—perhaps a problem or a grievance from one of his constituents—and the department may be reluctant or give an inadequate answer because of restrictive rules.

A real or imaginary barrier may stand between departments and members of the opposition in the sense that the public service is at the government's disposal. That is why members will feel sometimes that an official is trying to avoid or escape certain questions because he thinks that the subject is politically touchy. Personally, I have that problem mainly with the Department of Manpower and Immigration which is in charge of the Local Initiatives Program.

I know that as far as the motion is concerned I will be told that those documents are of a confidential nature and that the department has no choice but to refuse the information requested. For this reason, Mr. Speaker, one could rightly say that all reports from individuals and companies to the government are of a confidential nature.

I also want to say that the remarks found in the report of the auditor general relating to the use of public funds are quite fair, and the government should draw inspiration from them.

● (1710)

I should like to quote from the notes on the report of the auditor general a passage that appears to me to be very fair, which somewhat supports the motion through which I request the tabling of certain documents, in order to be in a position to control, in accordance with our parliamentary duties, expenditures and appropriations of public funds. I am referring to paragraph 195, on page 26, which states:

Weakening of parliamentary control over expenditure through failure to disclose the total cost of a project. Canada has undertaken to contribute \$6 million toward the cost of building a provincial

[Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse).]

ferry with ice-breaking capabilities of which \$3 million was paid by the Department of Regional Economic Expansion during the year and \$3 million is to be paid by the Department of Transport in 1972-73. When contributions to a single project are divided between the appropriations of more than one department, the full extent of the related cost—

—to a given department—

—is not adequately disclosed, thereby contributing to the weakening of parliamentary control over expenditure.

And further on, it says:

196 Irregular charges to Regional Economic Expansion appropriation. Charges of \$694,000 with respect to the projects mentioned in this paragraph were irregular as they came within the programs of other departments for which specific appropriations had been provided by Parliament.

A third point was raised by the auditor general concerning the same department, and I quote:

197 Irregular payment of a development incentive grant. The grant, of which \$442,000 out of a possible \$570,000 had been paid, relates to the takeover without interruption of the operation of a completely organized manufacturing firm which was in commercial production. It is difficult to understand how the acquisition of a functioning facility can be construed as being the establishment of a new facility as contemplated by the Regional Development Incentives Act.

The fourth point—the last I shall quote—will prove once more that we are justified in availing ourselves of the Standing Orders to present a motion for production of papers.

198 Grant made under Department of Regional Economic Expansion Act. Grant of \$33,500 paid to company notwithstanding the fact that an investigation showed that company equity was negative and the operation was not viable.

This will be my last quotation. I merely wanted to bring to the attention of the House the merits of my motion and I hereby invite hon. members to adopt it unanimously, so that the documents may be produced.

Mr. Speaker, this is not only out of curiosity, but to fulfil our duties as parliamentarians. If, as I said earlier, we authorize credits, we have the right and the responsibility to find out how things are done and the money administered.

Therefore, if an hon. member is entitled pursuant to Standing Orders to submit a motion to compel the government to produce documents, I hope this is no laughing matter and that this motion will be unanimously carried.

● (1710)

[English]

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate your recognition of me. The hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie (Mr. Symes) stood up at the same time I did. I am sure I will leave plenty of time to enable the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie to put his remarks on the record.

The notice of motion in the name of the hon. member for Bellechasse (Mr. Lambert) that we are discussing this afternoon reads:

That an Order of the House do issue for copies of the signed agreement and all other documents relating to the offer of a guaranteed loan made by the Department of Regional Economic Expansion to the Parc Samuel Holland Hotel of Quebec.

I think the basic reason that I, personally, would oppose this motion is that we are trying to get new industries