

Volunteer Organizations

of condoning activities favourable to candidates or political parties, even if it were the Progressive Conservative Party.

It is certain that the Income Tax Act has significant effects on charitable organizations and this is why it is important for the future and the health of the voluntary sector in Canada to allay any fear those organizations may have of losing their very crucial status simply because they expressed their opinions to the duly elected representatives of the people. The Government needs the opinion of voluntary organizations. Often, they are the first to inform the Government that such or such a service should be given to meet new social needs. As they work directly with people, and especially with those in need, they can see problems and challenges which escape the Government. Voluntary organizations have to be active and militant, and therefore the changes proposed last May are quite welcome.

However, as concerns the tax system, the status of these organizations is not the only matter at issue. The tax credit for charitable donations is still under considerations. For instance, we have to find out how the implementation of the tax credit would affect the taxation system and what would have to be the cost-sharing agreements between the federal and provincial Governments. Obviously, the advantages of the tax credit have to be balanced against those of the deduction from income. Would abandoning the deduction from income and replacing it with the tax credit add to the tax burden of the average taxpayer, and if so, how can we avoid it?

Mr. Speaker, Canadians are well aware that, unfortunately, all taxation matters are complex, and as much as a proposal seems desirable and complete, its repercussions always have to be examined before it is implemented. The voluntary sector has expressed its views at length to the Government on taxation matters.

Various departments have held consultations, public servants have made analyses and groups of volunteers have come to Ottawa to express their opinions. This exemplary show of sustained efforts will certainly enable us to solve progressively any future problem, and our Government will eventually find an equitable response. However, if we explain in detail all these taxation and income issues which concern the voluntary sector, it is because this is indeed an area where the Government can be helpful.

We are not at all certain that new mechanisms are needed to look at the voluntary sector as, because of its very nature, this sector includes many enthusiastic individuals and groups throughout the country only too eager to impart their ideas and points of view to us. As parliamentarians, we have a responsibility to listen to what they have to say and, from there, to find ways to improve the organization of Government services in this area.

• (1810)

Mr. Gabriel Desjardins (Témiscamingue): Mr. Speaker, it is with much interest that I take part today in this debate on the motion moved by my colleague the Hon. Member for Argenteuil-Papineau (Mrs. Bourgault). I congratulate her for the quality of her speech and I thank her for giving us the opportunity to make the apology of the volunteer sector. I think it is important that we, in the House, take once in a while the time to praise the admirable work of volunteers.

Mr. Speaker, as elected representative of the Témiscamingue riding, I can assure you that distant regions like mine and many others in Quebec have been developed thanks largely to the generous contribution of volunteers.

I wish to take this opportunity today to thank and pay tribute to all volunteer individuals and organizations who are at work in my region and greatly contribute to improving the quality of life of my fellow Canadians.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, I should like to provide an example of the kind of volunteer organizations which we have in our distant regions and which dedicate themselves to the safety of the people.

There are here a number of members from remote areas who suspect that I am referring to this great bunch of guys who are our volunteer firefighters. They are not paid, they give themselves the training of professional firefighters and decide, out of sheer generosity, to save the lives of their neighbours. There are a number of them in my own riding and I know that there are some people here who have a number of them in their own municipalities or small parishes. In order to understand their courage fully, Hon. Members should see it in the context of a region like mine, some cold winter night in December, when they must leave the comfort of a fireplace, rush out in a below 40 degree temperature to try and put out a fire and save lives. There are people like that back home. And I think it is an excellent occasion to pay tribute to these people who often risk their lives to save others.

In this sense, I think the Hon. Member for Argenteuil-Papineau is providing us with a great opportunity to pay tribute to all these peoples in our communities who, by the thousands, work very hard for the development of our communities.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, I should like to deal more specifically with the motion before us which asks that the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs report on the volunteer sector in order to evaluate its social and financial impact and to recommend appropriate ways of offering fiscal or other compensations to volunteers and volunteer organizations. I should like to make the following comments.

The volunteer sector has been there for a long time, Mr. Speaker. Over the years, it has taken up an important place amid the other well-known sectors in our society, the public sector and the private sector.