

This means it has to know them better, and so, in the opinion of this House, the Government should consider the advisability of establishing a national office for volunteer action, which would come under the Secretary of State.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I know that my colleagues are aware of the fact that they were elected with the help of volunteers. I can still remember some of them saying to me: Mrs. Bourgault, how is it that the Government, your Government, does not acknowledge that I have taken part in the election campaign and did accomplish something? That is how it started and this question kept coming up more and more often. I met a charming lady who has been doing volunteer work at the Argenteuil Hospital for 20 years. She sees patients who are alone or who have no family and she told me how important her work is for these people who, after days of solitude, suddenly see some light come into their life because this woman brings them news, newspapers or small gifts which she buys herself.

Mr. Speaker, volunteer action is very important for our society, but I am not saying that my motion today could not be improved, far from it. I am well aware that my colleagues will talk out this motion today as it is the practice in this House, and I accept this because I am now more familiar with parliamentary procedure.

However, I simply hope that, in the coming months, we can study more closely the role the voluntary sector, and if my first motion, which was debated on September 19, could be brought forward once more so that the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs could do an in depth examination of voluntary sector, everyone in this House would perhaps be better aware of the role of voluntary workers in their own constituencies, and even in the house next door because people often do not know that their neighbours are voluntary workers. That is all I want, Mr. Speaker, and if the Government could introduce a bill recognizing the voluntary sector in the near future, I would have achieved my purpose.

● (1730)

[English]

Mr. Roland de Corneille (Eglinton-Lawrence): Mr. Speaker, as the critic for the Secretary of State for the Official Opposition and as a Liberal, I listened with great interest to the proposed resolution presented by the Conservative Member of Parliament for Argenteuil-Papineau (Mrs. Bourgault). I also read her resolution and her speech of September 19 last year on the same subject and found it very interesting. In both cases I have felt that the spirit of her resolutions are well meaning. Her intention obviously is to encourage the voluntary sector of our community, which is of course very laudable.

In her desire to encourage volunteerism in her speech in September, she was advocating that the Government consider giving financial compensation to volunteers, which seems somewhat paradoxical. In the resolution we are considering today this Conservative Member from the Government benches is suggesting a new special office be set up to deal

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with the voluntary sector. This office would be empowered to decide on the status of voluntary organizations and give them certificates of accreditation. This office would also give certificates to volunteers of practical work done by them.

I am sure the motive behind them is laudable. These suggestions give me reasons for concern because in the attempt to harness the resources of volunteers and charitable organizations, she seems to suggest a considerable involvement by government and of government bureaucracy in the arena, at least, of the voluntary sector. Indeed, it seems to me that volunteers generally prefer donating their time and their talents to charitable organizations free from structures and motives of private enterprises which are motivated by profit, and also free from the encumbrances of Government bureaucracy.

It seems to me that the voluntary sector sees itself in partnership with Government and in partnership with private enterprise, but not in any way as a servant of Government or to be organized by it, or the servant of private enterprise. I agree that sometimes people are deterred, as the Member has pointed out, from being a volunteer because they cannot afford a babysitter, or the cost of transportation to go to various activities and return. If the organizations in the voluntary sector could only improve their financial base they would be better able to encourage broader participation of volunteers by themselves subsidizing those out-of-pocket expenses that can inhibit people from performing their voluntary services.

When we are talking about voluntary or charitable organizations I take it that what we are all talking about is the same thing. These are organizations dealing with assistance to a disadvantaged person or a group, advancement of religion, advancement of education, advancement of health, conservation of the natural environment and other purposes beneficial to the community, including cultural or social development or improvement of the physical and mental well-being of the community. This is the definition of voluntary organizations recommended by the National Voluntary Organization, which is an umbrella organization which tries to represent the interests of some 52,000 voluntary organizations across this country. I would like to tell the Conservative Member from Argenteuil-Papineau that such recommendations as she has made last September, and again today, have possible for reaching implications.

I am therefore surprised to learn from the National Voluntary Organization that until at least as of yesterday it has no record of being consulted about her proposals, nor apparently have any of the major bodies in the voluntary and charitable sectors that would be affected by her resolutions. I wonder why in an alleged year of consultation the Hon. Member has not first discussed the impact of the resolution with these organizations so that she could then report them to the House in the course of her presentation. Because she has not done so makes it indeed rather difficult, if not impossible, for us in the Official Opposition at this time to consider giving support to her resolution, at least until such time as an opportunity is