

of my party to set the federal government's relationship to and conception of the voluntary sector off on a new course.

In spite of the fact that over three million Canadians are involved in voluntary organizations, and in spite of the fact that these organizations provide such a wide-ranging list of vital services to our communities, the voluntary sector has traditionally been taken for granted, very much so, by Canadians. It is my view and the view of my party that the activities of the voluntary sector must not be taken for granted or considered peripheral, but rather that they are essential to the development and maintenance of a strong and vibrant Canadian social fabric.

Community based voluntary activities are crucial to Canadian society because it is through such interpersonal interaction, together with traditional institutions, that every Canadian develops and sustains his sense of personal and collective identity, his personal and social values, and his sense of personal responsibility towards others. Voluntary activities generate community; they forge the interpersonal bonds of identity and caring; they foster social responsibility, self-reliance and initiative in both the individual and the society. Voluntary activities promote those desirable qualities which we call citizenship.

In spite of the crucial role voluntary associations play in integrating individuals into communities and binding communities together into Canadian society, the continued existence of the voluntary sector in Canada has for some time been in jeopardy.

Inherent in any advanced industrial society are a multitude of pressures that work on the individual. A growing inclination towards professionalism and towards a more standardized, bureaucratic structure for the provision of increasingly specialized community and social services, and pressures from a growing attitude of passive materialism whereby personal worth is defined in terms of possessions and where government is expected to do everything: all these pressures militate against voluntary activity. They segment and obstruct interpersonal relationships; they destroy the social fabric, where people are increasingly alienated from each other, where people pursue only their individual self-interests, where people are passive, waiting for others or government to meet their needs, and when people just stop caring, then community and society fall apart.

Past governments have increasingly come to recognize some of the difficulties encountered by the voluntary sector. Traditionally, however, they have not only lacked a comprehensive policy to focus government programs, but as well the response of the federal government has usually obstructed or misdirected the efforts of the voluntary sector. Being unable to recognize the legitimacy and the proper functions of voluntary organization, except in terms of large, formal organizations which can fulfil the needs and objectives of the state, government therefore has increasingly tried to regulate and channel voluntary activities to suit its own needs and not those of individuals or communities.

Voluntary Sector

Through financial support and other incentives, government has gradually enticed the voluntary sector to alter its view of its own legitimate functions to suit government needs. This has created a very dangerous dependence of the voluntary sector on government. Government's view of the voluntary sector is thus paternalistic; it is ignorant of the inherent importance of voluntary activities to developing identity and self-worth in the individual; it is insensitive to voluntary activity as a medium of individual and collective expression and initiative. This dependency has become so ingrained that when economic conditions force government to tighten its belt, the voluntary sector feels immediately, and justifiably, threatened.

My party recognizes that voluntary activity, especially at the grassroots community level, responds to community and social needs and to issues for which a government response would be inappropriate or even detrimental. My party recognizes that a coherent and comprehensive policy for the voluntary sector must encompass those critical functions which fulfil individual and collective needs beyond the scope of government.

The primary purpose of the special committee on the voluntary sector is thus not to study whether the federal government should provide financial support of voluntary organizations. Rather, its purpose is to draw from previous research and from the grassroots a clear, coherent, and comprehensive policy and action strategy by which the government can establish in Canada those conditions through which the binding force of voluntary, community based activity will be encouraged. Our predisposition is thus to establish the necessary conditions through which the voluntary sector will prosper. The function of the special committee is to advise the government on how this goal can be achieved.

Given that an effective policy on the voluntary sector must be rooted in the needs and goals of communities, the process of putting together such a policy requires input from the grassroots and participation from persons who have ready access to the myriad voluntary associations across Canada. Clearly, members of Parliament are far more qualified to perform this task than are those public servants living in the rarefied atmosphere of Ottawa. The rationale for setting up a special committee is not only to focus the work of members of Parliament on this issue, but also to provide a forum for input by non-governmental bodies, not to mention fulfilling our pledge to increase the meaningful role of Parliament.

In addition to looking into those specific areas mentioned in the terms of reference, I expect the special committee will want to investigate the ways in which the growth of social consciousness and the concept of participatory society can be tapped to foster voluntary activity. I assume the government will want to define the limitations of government's role in meeting voluntary sector needs. Committee members will no doubt try to delimit the present impediments to the growth of voluntary activity and suggest how they can be removed. They probably will want to look at what permanent structures could be established to provide ongoing communication between government and the voluntary sector. They will, no doubt,