

The Economy

Like other members of parliament in the early days of the Local Initiatives Program I established a constituency advisory group in my constituency. Mr. Speaker, in response from one of the people I had asked to serve on that group I received a very interesting, and true story. It related to a community unknown to most members of this House, a little swelling in the road in western Alberta called Niton Junction. The people in Niton Junction wanted a community hall and they got together and applied for a LIP grant, and they failed. The man who served on the constituency advisory group from that area wrote to me afterwards and he said, "You know, 10 years ago the people of Niton Junction, if they wanted a community hall, would get together and build a community hall. Now they get together and apply for a LIP grant, and they are turned down." That means they have, failed on two counts. First of all they are left without the community hall they need, secondly they have worked together on something that failed and their sense of working together and co-operating together has become soured.

I think we must have much more attention paid to the social consequences of this kind of extensive government intervention into areas where volunteers previously made local communities work and strive for something they wanted.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: We have to ask ourselves, Sir, what is the cost to our sense of national community—our sense of working together as partners? There is a new and growing hostility between the public sector and the private sector. What Sir, is the cost to Canada of the continuing competition for power between different levels of government?

Another one of those immeasurable costs, and one which should be of particular concern to all of us in this House, is the damage which has been done to the credibility of our political system. For a decade Canadians have been told by their politicians that more and bigger government would solve their problems, whatever their problems were. Governments have become larger, and they have become more expensive, but the problems remain, and more and more Canadians have come to question, not simply the wisdom of the so-called solution, but they have come to question the integrity and the credibility of those in this institution and elsewhere who have been proposing those solutions.

We have come through a decade, Sir, in which people have put too much faith in government, which meant that they were putting too little faith in individual citizens or in private or voluntary groups. The response to virtually every problem was to create government programs. Those programs then grew beyond control. Examples abound; the growth of the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs, from its original purpose as a co-ordinator into a little empire of its own that competes with the people it was supposed to co-ordinate; Petro-Can which was established to make the government itself a competitor in the oil industry, and which has been used to bend and twist and distort regulations to give an unfair advantage to the creature of the government.

[Mr. Clark.]

Indeed, the very principle of decentralization has been—and I use the word deliberately-perverted into a program of patronage for ministers. I understand the Minister of Fisheries and the Environment (Mr. LeBlanc) is entertaining invitations from New Brunswick to go back and lead the Liberal party in that province. The understanding which I have is that he has agreed to accept that position on the condition that they will move the capital of that province to Shediac, New Brunswick.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clark: In Canada that tendency of putting too much faith in government has been aggravated by this particular government to concentrate power in their own hands. Some people sometime impute sinister motives to the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and his close colleagues in this regard. Frankly, I see nothing in this pattern more sinister than arrogance. They really do believe that they can run everything better than anyone else despite abundant evidence to the contrary.

Their pattern, the clear pattern of these ten years, has been to centralize power. Economic power is gathered to Canada by investment review agencies, by competition boards, by literally more Crown corporations that the government can count, and the growth, literally by volumes, of regulations.

[Translation]

Constitutional powers have been centralized in Ottawa through the creation of federal departments which are supposed to deal with matters of provincial jurisdiction, such as urban affairs, through financial blackmail, in the case of health insurance for instance, and through interference in traditional provincial jurisdictions such as natural resources, communications and culture. The Minister of State for Amateur Sport (Mrs. Campagnolo) is still trying to take away the powers of managing organizations in the area of sports and to concentrate government control. This trend toward centralization of power is one of the main causes of our problems in Canada and contributes to the increase in costs that we can no longer afford.

[English]

Years ago, Sir, if we look back on the history of political development, it required an act of imagination to recognize that government did too little, and the consequences of governments doing too little were poverty, injustice, and social turmoil. So government became active doing things that needed to be done, doing things that would not have been done without government intervention. We have an honourable history of that kind of intervention in Canada, and I am personally proud to lead a party which had the imagination to create the CBC, the Canadian Wheat Board, the Agricultural and Rural Development Act, and other necessary agencies.

However, I trust that the hon. member for Davenport, who has no concern for his constituents who are looking for work in the construction industry, will take the opportunity, now that he has been excluded again from the cabinet, to take part in this debate rather than sitting and shouting from his seat.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!