

Economic and Social Development

ties among either the nations of the world or the parts of Canada.

Science alone is not the answer to human development, as the Canadian Council on Social Development makes clear. Neither is economics. The incessant economic tendency of the strong to take from the weak must always be fought against. The danger of this is heightened by the fact that many Canadians now place the blame for our current troubles on excessive social welfare expenditures and are inclined to demand cutbacks in those programs first. For these reasons, Reuben Baetz, in the 1976 annual report of the council, calls for an over-all strategy for social development in a time of economic constraint.

If the over-all resources available for social development are to be more limited in the future, then they must be more concentrated on helping those most in need. Mr. Baetz identifies the most vulnerable groups as one-parent families, the retired living on diminishing savings, the physically handicapped and underemployed and unemployed youth. He calls for a much better understanding of the size and nature of our social welfare programs, arguing that their size is often exaggerated, their effect on inflation frequently misrepresented, and the "hidden welfare" of tax exemptions and corporate subsidies typically ignored. These are some of the questions we are beginning to examine as we look into the next decade.

Finally, I see the network of Canadian problems revolving around our perception of the conserver society. I suppose if you had to boil it all down you would say we hope for the kind of society in which conservation is going to be a good word. The source of our current problems, however, is much deeper and more complex than resource limitations alone. The conserver society, based as it is on a concept of growth with a purpose, will not be achieved merely by conserving resources. It calls for changes in our values and outlook. The conserver society recognizes that there are social limits to growth. The traditional values of thrift, efficiency and the avoidance of waste need to be re-found. This is also the theme of the Vanier Institute of the Family, trying to protect family values and to establish a better relationship between family and society that promotes social co-operation and the well-being of all. The key word to the conserver society is "rethink". We are being asked to question our need for things and the way in which Schumacher, in his book "Small is Beautiful", has raised these questions.

Clearly, the concept of the conserver society has greater implications than asking people to save 10 per cent or some other percentage. How can we ever expect people to accept the principles of the conserver society, which suggests serious changes in our lifestyles, without allowing them some input?

In conclusion, I urge parliament to reflect on the fact that many of our problems today are due to decision-makers of the past who ignored the future. Today we have new tools to build a future Canada, and our responsibility for doing so is all the greater. Building for the future is the most realistic kind of politics there is.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Mr. Roche.]

Mr. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Edmonton-Strathcona (Mr. Roche) has put before us a motion that really engages our imagination and thoughts. For that we are most grateful. It demands that we should project our thoughts forward to what we shall do in the eighties.

● (1720)

In his motion, the hon. member suggests how we should go about establishing priorities for the Canadian people. Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's proposal is to be commended. It deserves support. I say this because all who enter politics, whether they sit on the government side or in opposition, want very much to participate in the shaping of laws which govern not only what we shall do in the present, but anticipate—if that is the right word—that which is to come in future. However, I do not agree with one part of the position put forward this afternoon by the hon. member for Edmonton-Strathcona. In saying this, I do not wish to detract from the importance of his motion and the ideas he put forward this afternoon.

The concern he expressed about growth and about a conserver society strikes me as the sort of concern expressed by those who have "made it" in society, to use a popular expression, who have attained a certain degree of success in life and can therefore view with equanimity the prospect of diminishing growth or no growth. That concern is not shared by Canadians who have not "made it." Such Canadians look on growth as of the utmost importance. They do not look on it with fear or think it a bad thing. I cannot be convinced from my political experience, therefore, that growth is bad non-growth is good.

The tests of growth are these: What kind of growth is it? In what sectors of society does it take place? What kind of waste does it create? How does it contribute to the quality of life, if I may use an expression, the meaning of which is not well defined? Also, what are the advantages of growth? What benefits will it bring us? Conversely, what are the benefits of giving up certain goals which we in our lives pursue? Really, those who would try to persuade Canadian society and parliamentarians that we should look forward to no growth in the 1980's, or look on growth with suspicion as something bad, are engaged in a fruitless exercise. I do not think the pursuit of growth is terrible and I do not support the suggestion that we should not pursue it.

Having said that, I see, nevertheless, the merits of parliamentarians consulting with the Canadian people on the broader questions of our goals for the 1980s. I prefer this course. In the past parliamentarians have consulted with Canadians across this country on a variety of topics. The hon. member has already mentioned one. I think of the committee which travelled across the country at the time of our taxation reform. Before that a committee travelled across the country to consult citizens on the question of constitutional reform. That was a most successful process of consultation. In parentheses, let me add that consultation as a process of arriving at