

Social Development Ministry

Soon we will have to decide what kind of society we want, and we will have to start making our political decisions much more attentive to basic moral and philosophical questions because we will not have this expanding pie with which to defer these very difficult questions. This is the crucible in which I expect the Liberal party to find itself over the next few years, that the promises they have made to the Canadian people in terms of social policy and the promises they have made with regard to economic nationalism and everything else, will come tumbling down and will stumble over the fact that their first loyalty is to the same kind of economic orthodoxies to which their opponents on the other side, the Progressive Conservatives, are committed.

But that is not the only reason that all the laudable goals which are supposedly to be reached as a result of the establishment of the ministry of state for social development will not be reached. Another reason that they will not is administrative. What is happening here is an injection of another layer of bureaucracy between the idea stage and the implementation stage. It is not enough that we have the Privy Council and the Treasury Board. It is not enough that we have the cabinet, and it is not enough that we have the sheer, unending inertia of this government. Instead we have to insert within that process yet another level of procrastination and unnecessary deliberation.

Those of you who have read Franz Kafka's "The Castle" will perhaps be reminded of the difficulty which the main character in that book had in trying to get a hold of what was happening, and trying to figure out just where reality was, just who he could speak to who would make a difference. With the injection of this ministry of state for social development we have another layer of Kafkaesque administration laid upon the Canadian people, and laid upon their already legitimate dissatisfaction with the decision-making process of this government.

It will be just another layer of deliberation and accountability which will remove from this House the ability of the various on-line ministers to rise in their place daily in the question period and answer for the policies of their particular department, or for the lack of policy of their department. Now they will be able to hide behind the coat-tails of the minister of state for social development; they will be able to say, "I would sure like to do that, but it did not come to me through the envelope. Talk to the Minister of Justice, if you can find him when he is not off looking after federal-provincial relations, after justice concerns, or now after his added responsibility, the ministry of state for social development." We have in fact made all the on line ministers here junior. It is a very serious erosion of accountability, and if Parliament is not about accountability, then I do not know what it is all about.

Perhaps the on line ministers will be relieved—given what I had to say earlier about the inability of the Liberal government to deliver on its promises—not to have the full responsibility for this failure, and to defer to their busy elder, the Minister of Justice, who is already overworked.

It is incredible to me that one person should have oversight over social development, justice, and federal-provincial rela-

tions, and it lends credence to the theory that all that is happening here is that a particular administrative mechanism is being set up to supervise restraint within this government, a restraint which, I admit, will not be accompanied by all the self-righteous and destructive hoopla in which the Progressive Conservatives are inclined to participate when they embark upon a program of restraint, but nonetheless very subtle restraint. The Liberals always like to—

An hon. Member: Shift into easy.

An hon. Member: Silk gloves.

Mr. Blaikie: Silk gloves is the analogy which has been suggested to me by an hon. member.

An hon. Member: Iron fist.

Mr. Blaikie: But really an iron fist to the poor. It was said earlier, I think by the hon. member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore (Mr. Robinson), that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre was being unduly pessimistic when he spoke of some of the concerns we had about this new ministry of state for social development. I realize that to be pessimistic in this particular day and age is almost to sin against the Holy Spirit. What we have is uncritical optimism about the future, and this kind of optimism invades and infects everything we do.

I think it is important, whatever the future may look like, to be accurate and realistic. I would prefer to be realistic and to sound pessimistic to the uncritical optimist than to participate in the uncritical expectations that we have heard today about what this particular restraint mechanism will do for social policy in Canada. I realize they have been hard pressed to justify this ministry, particularly as it originated within the Conservative ranks, but it is not the first thing we have seen the Liberal government predisposed to adopt from their Conservative brothers, again lending credence, I submit, to our theory, which becomes more true every day, about Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

It may appear that to be against the co-ordination, integration and planning of social policy in this country is to be unfair and mean to the government. But the burden of truth will be upon them to show, over the next few years, that this initiative on their part is intended indeed to enrich and enhance social policy in this country and not simply to become a mechanism by which they may do, underhand and with less accountability, what they set out to do in 1978 when they first began the cutbacks phenomenon in August of that year. We will have to wait to see whether they can overcome the limitations of reality. They will not be able to do it.

● (2140)

Mr. John McDermid (Brampton-Georgetown): Mr. Speaker, this is the first opportunity I have had to offer my personal congratulations to the minister for the job he did in the recent referendum in Quebec. He was one of the few cabinet ministers on the other side of the House who spoke with his heart and not the pocketbook. I first came to know him when he was