

Social Development Ministry

That the following address be presented to His Excellency the Governor General of Canada:

To His Excellency the Right Honourable Edward Richard Schreyer, Governor General and Commander-in-Chief of Canada:

May It Please Your Excellency:

The House of Commons, having considered the proposed text of the order in council tabled in the House on 21 April 1980, in relation to the establishment of a Ministry of State for Social Development, prays that the making of the said order in council be approved.

Mr. W. Kenneth Robinson (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Social Development): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to lend my support to the motion by the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Social Development (Mr. Chrétien), a motion which, if passed by this House, would create a new, small, co-ordinating social policy secretariat to be known as the ministry of state for social development.

I would like to take this occasion to explain why I feel the establishment of this new agency is essential in order to improve the economy, efficiency, effectiveness and control of federal activities in the area of social policy.

I listened with great interest today to the hon. member for Rosedale (Mr. Crombie) who said a number of things. In particular, I was almost entranced by his taste of nostalgia for the 1960s, his reflections, if you like, on what was happening in Canada some 20 years ago. He suggested in effect that change should not be taken just for the sake of change, but rather change in society, a change for a return to the family and changes that would take place in the workplace. I think all of these are somewhat idealistic. However, they are achievable and are things we are all looking forward to in the not too distant future.

The government too is looking for change, not change just for the sake of change, but change to something worthwhile for all Canadians. The hon. member for Rosedale also mentioned that we need to have economic and social policy. Let me mention to the hon. member that I have been a member of the social planning council of metropolitan Toronto for 14 consecutive years and have worked toward this end for a great deal of time. I would suggest to him that we have to put the practical and the theoretical together, and what we are really talking about is not just economic and social policy, but public policy; it is for everybody.

The hon. member also mentioned there was considerable disparity. I suggest to him that the disparity could have been a great deal worse if in fact we had not put into place some of the programs we have put into place over the years from 1960 to 1980, for instance, the transfer programs from the federal government to the provincial governments. Had this not taken place I really wonder what might have happened so far as the provinces are concerned.

The hon. member talked about co-ops. I would say to him that, as far as co-op housing is concerned, the first co-op housing project in Etobicoke, the borough where I live, is in my riding of Etobicoke-Lakeshore, and it was the first one funded under the bill proposed by the Liberals when they were last in power. There was nothing done in the last short

Parliament, unfortunately. I am not blaming the former Parliament for that. I think it would have liked to have done more. I just suggest to the hon. member that I too feel this kind of social consciousness as far as co-op housing is concerned, and I was very pleased, indeed, that the first one in Etobicoke was located in my riding.

The hon. member also talked about power and influence. I suggest it is very difficult to have one without the other. What we have been doing federally for a long period of time is to give money by way of transfer payments to the provinces. We have the power to give away the money, we have the power to raise the money, but we do not have much influence on how they carry out programs once they receive the funds. This is something we may have to address. This is a good point brought before the House today. It is something we will have to look at in the future when we are talking about transfer payments to the provinces. Certainly we can learn from the past, and we can look into the future. I agree with him to some extent in this regard.

I was, however, somewhat disappointed by the pessimistic approach taken by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). It is not usual for him to take this approach. I would have thought he might have looked at this organization, this new responsibility, as one that would co-ordinate efforts which up until now seem to have been somewhat helter-skelter. It seems to me this proposal is one step in the right direction. He talked about senior citizens, veterans, mothers and so on. I am not suggesting we should have a department for each, but we should certainly have a co-ordinating process. It seems to me this new office we are suggesting, that of social development, is a step in the right direction, and hopefully it will not slow the process, but rather will hurry it. There will not be cutbacks but there may be some savings. There will be co-ordination which I think will be in the best interests of all Canadians.

In my view this new department will be concerned about responsibility, and we have a responsibility in this House to see how our departments are spending the money. If we cannot make the department officials responsible for how they spend the money, then certainly we as parliamentarians and politicians responsible to the taxpayers have to be concerned about how we and how the departments spend it.

Mr. Knowles: What does the Treasury Board do now?

Mr. Robinson (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): I am not so sure it is co-ordinated the way it should be, and as I understand it that is the reason for the department.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Robinson (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre has even suggested that we might have a department for senior citizens. I suppose that would add additional bureaucracy as well. Believe me, I am not one to consider adding bureaucracy for the sake of adding bureaucracy, because we have enough of it already. However, if we can do this from the point of view of having some