

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, April 3, 1984

The House met at 11 a.m.

● (1110)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY, S.O. 62—NEED FOR GOVERNMENT POLICY ON VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. Walter McLean (Waterloo) moved:

That this House condemns the Government for its failure to honour the commitment made both in 1974 and 1981 by Canada's Secretary of State to develop, in co-operation with the voluntary sector, a comprehensive government action policy with respect to the voluntary sector and urges the Government to provide an immediate incentive to Canada's 40,000 registered charities by implementing the give and take tax credit proposal.

He said: Mr. Speaker, in introducing this motion on behalf of the Official Opposition, on behalf of my Party, I do so more in sorrow than in anger. I say sorrow because, after 10 years of promises, of suggestions, of the development of a comprehensive working relationship between Canada's voluntary groups, we are at a stage at which gathering in Ottawa today and yesterday are representatives from 125 of Canada's major national voluntary groups and organizations. They are meeting in a state of frustration and a state of disillusionment about any appreciation on the part of the Government of Canada of their role and their potential for the future of our country. Happily they are meeting with their eye on the future, continuing to try to interpret and advocate to the Government their concerns, their potential and their outlook.

Among the senior executives and leaders of groups from across the country are Canadians with experience in the health care area, the cultural areas of Canada, areas of amateur sports, areas of international voluntary agencies, the religious community, environmental groups and others. They are from what we have come to call a sector of Canadian life, the voluntary groups, the non-profit sector which represents some 40,000 groups and is larger than the number of manufacturing units in Canada.

It is not my intention merely to beat the wind in negative terms, Mr. Speaker. I believe that rather than curse the darkness it is better to light a candle. Therefore, our motion today suggests that the Government enact a proposal which has been before it for nearly a decade—a proposal to provide tax credit. This proposal has its roots in the life of the voluntary agencies of Canada.

For those who are entering into the spirit of today's debate and may wonder just who is involved in this voluntary coalition, let me remind Members of the House and the public that, beginning alphabetically, the list of 125 agencies include the Anglican Church of Canada, the Arthritis Society, Association Canadienne D'Éducation de Langue Française, and Association Canadienne pour la Santé Mentale. It goes on through the Boy Scouts, the Canadian 4-H Council, the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association, the Canadian Cancer Society, Learning Opportunities for Women, the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews, the Canadian Council on Children and Youth, the Red Cross, the Council for Business and the Arts in Canada, Girl Guides, UNICEF and the United Way of Canada.

That will give some idea of the fact that there is no Canadian community without the presence of a voluntary group providing a unique contribution to our way of life. We are trying today to encourage public understanding and to encourage the Government to take this sector seriously. We are asking a fundamental question for Canadian public policy. How can we support, enable and encourage Canada's voluntary sector to play its full role in the development of the Canadian community?

● (1115)

It is ironic that after ten years, leaders of the voluntary agencies should be meeting at this very time, on this very day, in Ottawa, with representatives of the Macdonald Commission. On this morning's agenda the topics for discussion are: the future delivery of human services; the role and domain of the voluntary sector; government and voluntary sectors; nation building and the political process; future role of voluntary sector in Canadian unity; the recognition that society should give for voluntary work; the view and role of the voluntary sector in the redefinition of work for the long-term future; the mechanisms required to provide adequate funding, financial management and accountability. These are all subjects which were first introduced for public discussion more than a decade ago by the report entitled *People in Action*. I have looked through this report, Mr. Speaker, and I find the recommendations for 1976 are the same ones which are being presented today as if somehow they were new.

I want to suggest, Mr. Speaker, that as we begin our debate today, my colleagues will reflect in their comments upon the input of national voluntary organizations with respect to health care, culture and youth, showing that Canada's voluntary sector operates in the setting of a world community. The Secretary General of the Commonwealth, Shridath Ramphal, in speaking to the coalition leaders at the Conference of