

The Address—Mr. J. Epp

family and give it more prominence in society than I feel it has been given before.

The Government must at all times turn to Canadians in their homes, at their jobs and at their leisure for our source of inspiration and creativity, because it is that creativity which builds nations. I take real satisfaction as a Manitoban and as a Member of the House in finding a commitment to these vital principles in the Speech from the Throne. I know that my commitment and that of my colleagues in Government to work with all provincial governments, including my own, is real. We are optimistic about the first steps.

The strategy of encouraging investment and private sector job creation is practical. Though others might feel that we over-emphasize it from time to time, there is no question that in past years, either inadvertently or directly, there has been a downgrading of the importance of the private sector. That must be changed.

As I want to address the House today on issues within the Department of National Health and Welfare, I should like to take a moment to express publicly that I feel I am most fortunate as Minister in having the Parliamentary Secretary whom the Prime Minister appointed, the Hon. Member for Brome-Missisquoi (Mrs. Bertrand). She not only has compassion, she comes with much experience having lived and contributed to the public sector in her province. I am most fortunate in the fact that she is working with me.

The determination within our social programs to guard stability and fairness in our social policy is genuine and non-negotiable. I repeat that, to guard stability and fairness in our social policy is genuine and the views that it is not negotiable is shared by all Members of the House. Those are the underlying principles which must be met as to whether or not social policy should be part of our larger social fabric.

My remarks are devoted to certain aspects of the social policy of the Government and of Canadians generally. It is by now a truism that we in Canada have a social system of which Canadians are proud and with which most Canadians are secure. No fair Canadian would deny that all Parties in the House have contributed to the design and the creation of this system—the Liberal Party in office, the New Democratic Party in Opposition and our Party in both roles. I return to the first Bill passed by the Defienbaker government which addressed social policy or to the first Bill, which the administration of the present Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark) passed in 1979, that is, the extension of the spousal allowance. As Hon. Members will know, in the present Speech from the Throne there is a further step in the area of pension reform for widows and widowers. That being the Canadian record, no fair Canadian would claim that we have finished the job. Those who say that we must not tamper with the social system are not only arguing against eroding our social system—and that is not my intention in any way, shape or form—but too often are falling into the trap where they argue against improving the social system. That is important. If the job is unfinished, the debate about social policy is unfinished. If there is more to be done, this Parliament must

get on with the job of furthering that act. This is what the Minister of Finance had in mind when he said the following in the House a week ago:

—we must ensure that growth will be for the benefit of all Canadians and that the costs of change will not fall on those least able to bear them. To provide this assurance, we must make certain that those who really require social assistance receive it. We must also ensure that our social support systems encourage self-reliance rather than create a dependency on government.

It would be foolishness or dishonesty, or possibly both, to suggest that we can more effectively meet the needs of the most disadvantaged without giving a thought to the source of resources or the best means of putting those resources in their hands. Such a careful look at the design of social programs has as much to do with good social policy at any time as it does with husbanding resources in a time of economic crisis.

Going back into the history of the development of social policy in the country, in the postwar period legislators were concerned that if changes were not made, we might sink back or slide back into a depressed economy such as we had experienced in the 1930s. It has been built up gradually and carefully, but always one has had to keep in mind the fact that good social policy is best protected when there is economic growth. Too often, I would suggest, the two solitudes in society have tried to separate that—those who put stress on the economy on the one hand arguing the economic factors and those on the social policy side stressing that side. While that is natural—and I understand it—the time has come that both groups and both views are melded so that we can develop further coverage in social policy.

I can only assume that this is what the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner) had in mind when he said in the leadership race for the Liberal Party that he would reduce the federal deficit by some \$15 billion in seven years. I assume that a concern with equity and with effectiveness of taxpayers' dollars is what motivated the Hon. Member for Saint-Henri-Westmount (Mr. Johnston) to argue the very same during the leadership contest when he said that a re-examination had to take place.

Canadians are understandably and justifiably concerned with any debate on the comprehensiveness of social programs or the level of resources committed to them. I believe it would be helpful to reaffirm what the Government has said in this regard. First, the Government talked about a review of two of our social policy programs, that is, the child benefit system and the elderly benefit system. Today in Question Period I was pleased to note that the spokesman on social policy for the Official Opposition said in his question that he supported a review. I welcome not only his comments but also his input.

● (1630)

Second, these systems were designed to support all Canadians who fall into the categories of having children, that is in the case of the family benefits program, or those who are over the age of 65.

The third principle behind the design of our programs has always been that the benefits of these programs should be