

Government Orders

the quality of services offered to these people. This is further evidence that Quebec's sovereignty is the only valid solution to this administrative nightmare.

[English]

Mr. Pat O'Brien (London—Middlesex): Sir, may I offer my congratulations on your attaining the position of Deputy Speaker.

The minister's initiative in the area of social services is certainly much overdue and much needed in this country and gives us all cause as Canadians for serious reflection about what really is the role of government, or what ought to be the role of government in our society as we move toward the 21st century.

A conservative would have us believe that government should do very little, that really everything should be left to the marketplace, that just like business and the market take care of everything and those who earn, wealth will trickle down to those who do not have such wealth and that everything will be wonderful in our society; so-called Reaganomics, if you will, or the path followed by Margaret Thatcher and by the previous government in this House.

It is quite obvious that such an approach to government in society has been a miserable failure. Never has the gap between those at the top, those who have, and those at the bottom widened more significantly in such a few short years as it did in the 1980s in North America and in Britain and other parts of the world.

• (1610)

It is quite obvious that the conservative philosophy is quite bankrupt as we move toward the end of this century and the start of a new era.

On the other hand, we have the socialist philosophy that government should do everything for us. It should take care of us from the cradle to the grave. There is very little that the citizen should have to do. Let government do it all. That has been tried in different parts of the world with very limited successes, producing such an incredible tax burden on countries that they have had to totally rethink the way their society is structured. It has produced a paternalistic society in which all too often the initiative of the individual is stifled almost completely to the point at which they simply feel that they are a ward of the state.

Between these two extremes of the far right and the far left you have what I feel, and history has proven it to be the sensible position, is the position of a liberal; a far more balanced position, founded on the ideas of some of the greatest thinkers of political science in history.

A liberal view espouses the fact that there is a social contract or that there ought to be in a society a social contract between

the citizen and the state, that the state is there and gains power through the actions of the citizenry in giving that power temporarily to the state. The duty of government is to assist the citizen to realize his or her full potentials, then to work in partnership with the private sector and to let that citizen and the private sector work together for job employment, job creation and so on. To a large extent it is the private sector which will help to foster employment in a society.

A liberal rejects the notion that there is no role for government to play whatsoever. That is simply not a view that I can find acceptable. The lessons of history are that there must be a role for government.

In this debate about the reform of social security let me quote perhaps one of the best expressions of the role of government that I have come across in my life time. It comes from Hubert H. Humphrey, a former vice-president of the United States. There are some lessons we can learn from our American friends. Perhaps there are many they can learn from us as well.

Mr. Humphrey said the moral test of government is how it treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in twilight of life, the aged; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped".

Surely that is the kind of test we want to put before any government as Canadians. That is the kind of test that this current government is quite prepared to stand up and meet in its mandate over the next four or five years. The minister's initiative in this reform of social security is a very clear testament to that.

On this side of the House and in Canada in general there are those who say the Liberal Party should refrain from using the word reform since it is the label of one of the current parties in the House. I categorically reject that. The real reformers in this House are those members on this side who are true to their liberal principles. That is who the real reformers are.

I will never stop using the word reform because it is a word which history has shown to be a liberal word. The liberals on this side of the House are proud to be members of the Liberal Party and we intend to continue to have our voices heard within in our own caucus, within this House and within this country to make sure that our views are put forward with the views of Canadians all across this country who share the fact that there must be a role for government to play.

What are the areas of reform that need to be examined in our current look at these particular problems? The unemployment crisis we face, if not the most serious situation, is right near the top of the list. Never have so many suffered so much in such a few short years in terms of job loss. Not since the days of the great depression. We simply must attack that and do everything we can as a government and as a nation to get Canadians working again.