

Social Policy

It answers that question with an overwhelming conclusion, and that conclusion is "No". The fact is that over the past decade Canadians have been paying more and more taxes, and almost everybody realizes that. We know that in 1978 the average worker is paying \$1,500 a year in income tax as compared with less than \$400 when this government first took office.

Canadians have been paying these taxes believing that, because of the government's proliferation of welfare programs, fewer and fewer Canadians have been living in poverty and that the gap between the rich and the poor was being narrowed. Now they are waking up from this giant spending spree which has been conducted on their behalf by the government. Canadians are waking up to discover that any narrowing of the gap between the rich and the poor has occurred in spite of, and not because of, the government's policies, and that although inflation may have raised the poverty line, nevertheless, there are still some three million Canadians who live below that poverty line. That is the shocking and bare truth with regard to poverty in this country.

The truth is we do not have a welfare state. Rather, what we have is gross mismanagement of the taxpayers' money and of the country's resources. Sadly, a number of recent reports do indeed show that we have not reduced poverty in Canada. We have shifted the numbers a little. Families are a little bit better off than they were, with some 17 per cent living in poverty in 1969 and almost 12 per cent now. Some 32 per cent of the unattached youth lived in poverty in 1969 and 35 per cent do now. However, overall the basic picture has not substantially changed. There is still too much poverty in this country, and the government's words of self-praise about its success in reducing poverty do not conform to the facts. There is a very real discrepancy between what the government says and what the government does. On the one hand, we have the true facts about poverty in this country; on the other, we have what the government says are the facts.

Just recently, in the last few weeks, we had an even more striking example of the divergence, the differences, between the government's words and the government's actions. That striking example was seen in the recent issuance of guidelines to charitable organizations, those organizations which direct so much effort toward alleviating social and economic problems, particularly in respect of the poor of this country.

In a recent speech the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) had fine words for our country's charitable and voluntary organizations. I should like to quote a paragraph from his March 22 speech to the Economic Club of New York. He said in the course of that speech:

The not-for-profit and voluntary sectors of our societies could be made to flourish. Historically they have been the source of the humanizing social movements which were the life-blood of our liberal democracies. They have employed the creative energies of many of our people. Their decline has been inevitably reflected in a growth of government and commercial services. It has resulted in a loss of a sense of community. Surely we need this sector. We need to develop alternate styles of work and leisure and we need to demonstrate that there are other ways of doing the community's work. On a broad second front we must give encouragement and sustenance to these efforts. There is no threat here, only boundless opportunity.

[Miss MacDonald.]

Those were the words of the Prime Minister in New York a few weeks ago. Of course, he was right to say we need this voluntary sector. I suggest we need it more than ever with the government's failure to cope with poverty in this country; more than ever we need the work of charitable and voluntary organizations. We need them too to help prod this government into action to even out the economic inequities. The Prime Minister was right to say they could be made to flourish and that we must give encouragement and sustenance to their efforts. What fine words these were on behalf of the Prime Minister.

When it comes to actions instead of words, what do we find? This is where we find the divergence. We find instead a set of guidelines that, far from offering encouragement, gives restrictions to and curtailment of the activities and freedoms of these organizations; which, far from helping those organizations to flourish, effectively serves to muzzle them in their efforts; which, far from providing the boundless opportunity the Prime Minister promised, raises the spectre of intimidation.

How can these charitable organizations, most of which are attempting to ameliorate the plight of certain underprivileged groups of people, be made to flourish when all of the avenues of effecting change are being closed to them? If they are not allowed to lobby, to hold public demonstrations or to conduct letter-writing campaigns to elected representatives, how can they make the government aware of their concerns? How can they get their point across if effective methods of doing so are considered to be what this government terms political and, as it says, "a threat to their status as charitable organizations"? We are not talking about partisan political efforts here at all. What the government says in its circular is that it sees any involvement in the political process, even that of recommending legislation on an issue of national concern, as a questionable and perhaps even subversive activity by these groups.

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As it points out in the circular, these groups must do nothing to embarrass the present government because that, too, would be considered illegal or would be questionable enough to have their charitable status withdrawn. We have seen that government legislation, all too often over the years, has reached out to intrude more and more into the lives of Canadians, both of the rich and of the poor. This is a fact of life that Canadians begrudgingly accept, but the corollary of the simple fact of the growth of government activity is that in this day and age any meaningful change in the situation of any particular group which has been overlooked, overburdened or unprotected by the mass of existing legislation can only be affected by changing legislation.

Any legitimate effort to influence changes in legislation has now been declared political by this government, and in its view is therefore unacceptable activity by a charitable organization. We have an absurd situation here, Mr. Speaker: Charitable organizations cannot do their work except by being what the government terms political; but if they engage in political activity, they lose their tax exempt status as a charitable