

The proposed motion states three objectives relative to strengthening the role of the voluntary sector: first, as an objective that is invaluable in its own right, and there is no real elaboration on that point; second, as an alternative to public dependence on government services; and third, in ways that would enhance the ability of such groups to operate independent of government.

If one were cynical, one might wonder if there is a hidden motive here. Is the hand of the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Stevens)—the hand of the “slavish slasher”—looming over us to curtail, cut back and starve voluntary services? Is he also planning to rid the government of responsibility for essential public services? We on this side of the House will certainly be watchdogs to ensure that this is not the main interest of this government in reviewing the voluntary sector. In all seriousness, I hope that that is not the government's intention.

During times of high unemployment which create many economic and social stresses for families and individuals, the need for public and private services increases. The government must not pay for the national debt by cutting essential human services. We recognize the value of volunteer participation in both private and community services. Effective volunteer effort benefits the community, but it must also be satisfying to the volunteer. Training and support are very essential. The days of volunteering as a charity service are long gone. Now volunteer activity is a means of mutual help and learning.

In recent years there has been a major change in the nature of volunteer help. With the growth of welfare rights groups, citizen's action movements and self-help community services, the role of the middle class volunteer has changed. No longer do low income people who take pride in their own efforts and who want to be in control of decision-making in their own communities welcome the lady bountiful or the patronizing patrols who used to come down from the other side of town to do good. Indigenous members of low income communities want and have the right to funds, opportunities and training to develop their own leaders, their own programs and their own actions to solve community problems.

There are many new types of volunteer actions which are evolving, some of which were reported in the recent study I mentioned but many of which were not, and I hope that this committee will look at them. I am thinking particularly of new innovations such as were developed by low income people on welfare in Vancouver under a program called the Vancouver opportunities program. Under this program people on social assistance received an incentive allowance to work in the community to develop many self-help programs of their own and to grow and develop confidence which eventually led to their own employment. I understand that there is also potential for looking at this program in relation to unemployment insurance, where claimants in a voluntary way might give of their efforts and develop their own potential through community activities while unemployed.

As a result of these new developments and their self-help nature, many middle-class volunteers have had to find new

ways to participate in their communities. They have become involved in their own community issues. So we see the growth of environmental people's movements, and we see new alliances and mutual partnerships being formed where people with a greater degree of education, skill and perhaps leisure time are sharing their skills as resource people with groups that need such expertise.

We recognize the value of volunteer participation, but voluntarism cannot replace the need for quality programs and services that are essential to meet the basic needs of Canadians. Essential services are a public responsibility available without stigma for those in need, and should be paid for by all of us through an equitable sharing of our tax dollars.

It is important that the proposed special committee confirm that approach as a basic first assumption and confirm the areas of community service that are a legitimate, essential public responsibility so that we not lose the programs which we have struggled so hard to establish over the past years. Public responsibility includes the provision of public health, medical care, adequate income supplements, pensions, employment services, social services—both preventive and remedial—child welfare and many broad educational and recreational and para-professionals are needed. Most of them are government employees, but there is also a great potential for the use of volunteers as long as they are used in appropriate roles in public services as well as in private organizations.

I hope that these roles will be clarified in this committee with the agreement of organized labour so that people who wish to help as volunteers—perhaps in schools, in public health services and so on—may perform these satisfying and important tasks without replacing potential paid employees. Of course, there are many programs which are co-sponsored by public and private organizations in which volunteers are also active. I hope that these programs will also be considered.

We in this party agree that volunteer participation by citizens in social action and community programs is essential to democracy. We believe that government should encourage and actively facilitate such development. This is not to say that we necessarily agree that long established, highly institutionalized, self-perpetuating private agencies are all necessarily relevant to the needs of today. Many of them I think are not and should be reviewed.

Nor should such programs necessarily be funded at the expense of more dynamic, indigenous groups that have grown out of people's own needs and a desire to solve their own problems in communities. I hope that this committee will look at new self-help community services and people's movements which have emerged in recent years and which are not now a part of the welfare establishment. In fact, many of them have difficulty getting meagre funds allocated through community united appeals.

The role of advocacy groups in helping individuals who are beaten down by the red tape of bureaucracies and of groups which are pressing for institutional legislative reform is also very important. It is a very worth-while voluntary activity that is important to government if it is to function effectively