

Government Orders

I do not know exactly, but it might be that the rest of Canada would like to reshape its relationship with the federal government.

• (1200)

It might be that there is a fundamental need in the rest of Canada to redefine social programs in a way which would go along the lines of the minister. I am quite ready to respect that. I think we should let them do it, but they should not impose their views on Quebec because we have different views.

It appears to me that if the minister has his way with the cabinet and the government party, and if this reform is enacted, if we have the additional cut of \$7.5 billion announced in the *Toronto Star* yesterday, it means that we are due for a long and historical confrontation again.

The Prime Minister will ride again as a federal fighter against Quebec and we will have a long, very negative, unproductive fight between the two levels of government. We in Quebec are not ready to do that again. We have gone through that for thirty years now. It would be unhealthy to begin again.

I think we should respect our different orientations. We should be able to sit down and recognize that it is a law of nature and necessity to accept that we go our way. That is my conclusion.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express on behalf of my colleagues and millions of Canadians profound disappointment in the social policy discussion paper tabled by the minister in this House and presented to Canadians.

The government has been in office for almost a year. It promised an action plan to reform Canada's frayed and overburdened social safety net. I remind the House it was an action plan that was to have resulted in legislation this fall. Instead it has produced a discussion paper listing various proposals without any clear plan of action by the government to meet the very real needs of the young, the old, the sick and the poor, without any clear commitment on the part of the government to get to the root of the problem of any real reform in the social safety net.

As a discussion paper the document is severely flawed because the options it offers are limited and vague and because there is no information on the costs of proposed programs. Since affordability under the current circumstances is a key criterion the absence of price tags and detailed cost estimates vaguely undermines the discussion paper's usefulness as a consultation document.

What is so tragic is that the real discussion of social policy and social reform has been going on in this country for years among ordinary people, among taxpayers, among certain academics, among the victims of the systems, among real reformers, but not among Liberals.

The federal government is not really in a position to lead a discussion on social reform. It simply needs to get in on the discussion which is already far advanced. Since the government's social policy review falls so far short of what was promised and expected, it falls to other members of this House to do three things.

First, we need to make clear to the minister what is unacceptable about the current operations of social programs in Canada. We need to spend some time on the unacceptability of the status quo. Second, we need to enunciate the principles of genuine social reform that should be applied to the hodge podge of proposals in this paper, principles that would form the basis of a real action plan in the months and years ahead. Third, we need to challenge the minister to address the root of the problem in reforming the social safety net, namely the over centralization of power and responsibility in Ottawa.

• (1205)

Allow me to respond to the minister's proposals under these three headings. First, on the unacceptability of the status quo, Canadians are committed not just in their heads but in their hearts to helping their fellow citizens in need. In a country such as ours it is simply not acceptable for children to be growing up without adequate food, housing, care or education.

It is not acceptable for senior citizens to be living out their years with inadequate care and resources. It is not acceptable for sick people to wait on longer and longer hospital waiting lists for fewer and fewer hospital beds. It is not acceptable for hundreds of thousands of able bodied working Canadians to be chronically unemployed and underemployed.

It is not acceptable that the billions of hard earned taxpayers' dollars that Canadians generously provide to the three levels of government every year for social spending are so mishandled that the basic needs of individuals and families are not met. It is not acceptable that the government respond to the needs of today by forcing the cost on to the Canadians of tomorrow through massive public borrowing. Growing public debts only contribute to the impoverishment of future Canadians.

Finally, it is not acceptable for a government that has been in office for a year to respond not with an action plan but with an inaction plan that will at best serve the government as an excuse for further delays. It is not acceptable that the paper fails to provide the cost estimates that are essential to a meaningful discussion. It is not acceptable that the major areas of social policy, including old age pensions and health care, both of which are in deep financial trouble, are being put off to some future date. It is not acceptable that legislation flowing from the discussion paper may take years to reach the House.