

Voluntary Organizations

given to organizations such as the NVO to reflect upon them and reflect their concerns and interests.

I agree with the idea that greater Government co-ordination of its goals and activities is badly needed. After all, since charitable organizations play such a vital role in our civilization, and since they cover a very wide area of activities, it is important that the Government should designate some Minister of the Crown as the lead Minister who will take the time and the effort needed to enter into ongoing dialogue with the voluntary sector, and to co-ordinate the activities of the Government in its various Departments.

I hope that the Government will give consideration to the suggestion to make it possible for the voluntary sector to be better served by having a lead Minister who is and accepts the responsibility to deal with the voluntary sector. What is even more important, Mr. Speaker, and on this there is considerable agreement in the voluntary sector, is that what is needed is Government action to encourage the voluntary sector to be able to attract increased financial donations from individuals and corporations.

I have spoken on this matter on a number of occasions in the House, indeed others from both sides of the House have done so as well. The matter is one that needs urgent consideration. Over the years the percentage of people and companies contributing to charities is declining, as is the size and percentage of their gifts, in terms of income. The National Voluntary Organization has for years been advocating new incentives in income tax to increase charitable giving. More specifically, it has advocated the so-called give and take program, which would provide a 50 per cent tax credit for charitable contributions. Indeed, this is what the present Minister of State for Immigration (Mr. McLean) promised before the Government was elected in 1984. When in Opposition, he made the give-and-take proposal his pet crusade. Let us look at a few of the promises he made. I can hardly do justice to all of them, but when in Opposition, the Minister of State for Immigration who was the previous Secretary of State said the following:

● (1740)

We are committed to a fundamental realignment of the tax treatment for charitable giving—the principle of a charitable tax credit—which will offer equitable incentives to all taxpayers to support their charities.

In other words, he said that he was entirely in favour of the give-and-take proposal. He also said that the voluntary sector was the largest employer of lower and middle-class Canadians and he was right when he pointed out its importance. In addressing the voluntary sector, the Minister of State for Immigration said the following:

You (the Voluntary Sector) offer many less advantaged Canadians a bridge to employment. Canada's Voluntary Sector is an untapped resource that not only can reduce Government spending but can actually create jobs in the process.

This is why we are committed to a principle of a charitable tax credit, to a tax environment which will offer equitable incentives. Give and take is on the agenda.

He said that give and take was on the agenda and the other statements I cited so far in a speech addressed to the National Voluntary Organization convention. The Prime Minister (Mr.

Mulroney) promised to the National Voluntary Organization and the 52,000 voluntary organizations the following just before the last election:

We are committed to implementing a Tax Credit equal to a percentage of donations made to registered charities.

Unless something is done to increase the level of charitable donations by widening the potential number of contributors and the size of their gifts, the voluntary sector will be less and less able to assume responsibilities for social work and the serving of social needs. This means either increased Government programs which will cost the taxpayers money or less adequate, deteriorating services for the community.

The flame of volunteerism must be kept burning brightly. The willingness to give of oneself and of one's time and talents freely as a gift of love is vital to a healthy moral society. Therefore, it is important that contributions to charities increase. However, they are decreasing. The promises of the Government in this regard were unfortunately not kept in the last Budget. It is to be hoped that for whatever reason, this urgent matter not be set aside again. It takes years to educate the public to recognize the incentives a tax credit would provide and the time to act is now.

If such incentives as tax credits are to be provided, obviously another important matter that must be settled is the definition of a charitable organization. I have already described the definition recommended by the National Voluntary Organization. In fact, in December 1983, the Government of the day announced its intention to establish a joint committee of the House and the Senate to deal with matters concerning the voluntary sector and took steps to establish such a committee in April 1984 in consultation with the present Minister of State for Immigration. The Government then changed, as we all know, but the need still exists nearly two years later.

An acceptable legal definition of what constitutes a charitable organization is still needed. Urgent action is required to reverse the regressive negative spiral in financial contributions to voluntary agencies. It is this Government which promised it would act and the voluntary sector will watch to see what the next Budget brings.

If the Government is shortsighted and is so preoccupied with allegedly cutting the deficit that it cannot see that it can over a few years relieve itself from spending responsibilities by encouraging contributions to the voluntary sector, then it will be making a grave mistake. The voluntary sector, by its activities, can prevent escalating costs in social health and cultural programs. We neglect the voluntary sector at our peril.

In one area, the Government has made some progress by defining and clarifying to what extent a charitable organization may participate in approaching Governments to try to influence political decisions. I believe that in the main, the Government's solution has been found to be acceptable and so far seems to be serving quite satisfactorily. While this is progress, let us hope that the Government will bite the bullet with regard to the real issues at stake, the issues that are fundamental to the survival and good health of the voluntary