

OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH



David MacDonald, 36, often acts as a youth critic for the Progressive Conservative Party. The following is his analysis of O.F.Y.

There is much that can be said for the Opportunities for Youth Programme, indeed, with the notable exception of the member from Cochrane there are few liberals who aren't publicly doing so.

The Secretary of State and the various liberated young people who still cling to the mysticisms of what his department claims to be doing, have acclaimed the Programme as almost a second coming for the young generation (the first, of course, was the descent of the sandaled prophet from Mount Royal). I don't think I have ever heard the word "challenge" used so often and so much in vain.

The idea of encouraging post secondary age Canadians to submit community-oriented projects for public funding is a good one. What concerns me, however, is the basis and origin of the government's plans for the programme.

The three basic issues surrounding the programme are the following:

- (a) The failure of the government to make a national and well planned decision early enough in the year to be of real value.
- (b) The general economic situation into which students seeking employment were plunged.
- (c) The lack of broad consultation with the young people themselves previous to preparation of the programme.

These three basic issues serve to haunt both the premises and operation of the government's approach to student unemployment during the summer months. What are some of the important priority considerations here?

It would appear to me that an a priori concern here must be the provision of revenue-producing work that is neither at odds, nor in competition with, the other working sectors of the economy. If the summer months continually herald a threat to those who already have jobs, then there will never be any great public pressure to help the students. For the last few years, the government has chosen the make work approach to this problem. In this regard, what has happened this year, is at least refreshing in its tone.

However the answer must ultimately lie in the designation of areas of work that students are best suited for. By this, I do not mean work that young people should be restricted to but rather, work that they, as a group, can perform more competently than any other group within society.

Community development work, research, social animation are all areas that require individuals of high idealism, flexibility, enthusiasm and faith. To a very great degree, Canadians between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five are in the best position to offer this type of ability with the mobility and 'with it' tone of their actual education.

There are many areas controlled in government and industry by men who have lost their idealism and their faith; there are people who are approaching social problems of the 70's with the attitudes and education of the forties and fifties.

Young people can do this type of work better. The rest of society should be prepared to admit this, and react accordingly.

With this in mind, we need the comprehensive development of an overall strategy for seasonal employment for the next decade. Of course, before we can have this, as opposed to a half-cocked approach at youth policy, filled with enough generalizations and obscurities to make even Paul Martin wince, we need a government that cares, That's the rub.

It's all very well to rationally decide to put the public faith (and the funds to match) in the new generation. That's the type of rational decision that our party has been advocating for a long time. However, to leave the question of initiative to the young people simply because the government never appropriated a priority spot for the plight of the young people early enough in the year, is to use the best ideas to mask the most obvious form of political incompetence.

However, even putting aside the fact that this new faith in young people was only an escape for a government that didn't care enough for young people to start working on some integrated solution to the problem at a reasonable date, we have the problem of the Prime Minister's challenge to young Canadians to produce projects of social merit and value.

That challenge was so cynically issued as to be obviously paternalistic in its intent.

Here is some of the history involved; when the government told Parliament that consultations were under way with the provinces, it as yet had neither programmes nor a staff. In fact, during the weeks that consultations were allegedly in progress, staff was being hired in sporadic, panic stricken bursts on the part of people from Stanbury's office and Pelletier's office. When the consultations finally commenced, just a few days before the final announcements were made, they amounted to nothing more than zip and out visits of the Secretary of State. No input from the provinces was allowed. In many of the provinces officials are still unsure of what the programme is all about.

When the Prime Minister issued his challenge to the Canadian youth on March 16th, the Secretary of State and officials were extremely frightened that because of the closeness to final examinations, many young people would not be able to submit projects. THEIR APPRECIATION OF THE VITALITY AND INITIATIVE OF CANADIAN YOUNG PEOPLE WAS SO HIGH THAT THEY HAD STAFF PREPARED TO DRUM UP BUSINESS!! That's the type of faith many of our self-starting generation can do without, thank you very much.

When the vast number of projects came in, the sheer incompetence of the government to properly answer the young applicants was equally evident. All the high priced help in the world could not camouflage the basic lack of a system of evaluation, a coherent and unchanging set of criteria, and sheer clerical ability.

Then the high priced PR types were brought into play to divert the attention of Canadians from the three basic issues surrounding this programme. When we should have seen wider spread press coverage relating to the nature of the projects approved (both good and bad) we were seeing human interest stories on over-worked administrators of the programme. When the press finally saw through the public relations screen, many pressmen over reacted, attacking projects without real examination and not mentioning the many hundreds of worthwhile projects that were being funded.

Skill testing Answer: YOU LOSE! TAKE OFF YOUR CLOTHES!!