

Canadian Post-secondary Institutions

• (1740)

[English]

That motion is extremely reasonable in light of the studies which have been conducted by the Standing Committee on External Affairs. It certainly fits into the experiences we have had as we researched this matter across the country.

Having served as the Liberal critic for the Secretary of State for two years and as Chairman of the National Liberal Task Force with my colleague, the Member for Grand Falls—White Bay—Labrador (Mr. Rompkey), I have devoted considerable time and study to our post-secondary educational system in Canada.

In the course of this examination we received submissions from 160 individuals and organizations. We listened to people from all across Canada, including students, professors, university and college administrators, parents and alumni. People from one end of the country to the other have a concern about the condition of the post-secondary educational system but, interestingly enough, despite their preoccupation with that area they also showed great concern to bring to our attention the subject of international students.

Whether we listen to presidents of universities like Dr. Bill Saywell of Simon Fraser at one end of the country, or Dr. Andrew MacKay from Dalhousie at the other end of the country, or Dr. Ron Ianni, President of Windsor University, and to presidents all across the country, they have all expressed a deep concern about the problems facing international students in our country.

Of course, this involves the fact that there are certain fees which must be paid by foreign students which are greater than those fees paid by Canadians. It may be an initial thought that this is only fair, since they are coming from a foreign country and taking advantage of our universities. However, when we consider the question in more detail we find that those university students abroad enrich our country, not only by their presence or culture, but economically.

Various studies have been made on this matter, but I think that a summary which was made by the Vancouver Board of Trade, in a study into this entire matter, is extremely revealing. It brings to our attention the fact that international students bring us riches financially and economically as well as in many other ways.

The Board of Trade says that it is estimated that there were 53,500 foreign students in Canada during 1985-86. According to these statistics, it is projected that their presence will contribute over \$500 million to the Canadian economy, with roughly \$400 million of this amount originating outside Canada. Therefore, it is clear that the education in Canada of students from other countries is a significant, "invisible export", contributing in the order of \$400 million to Canada's balance of payments. In other words, international students in our country are a kind of industry, an industry that brings to us economic reward and gain. It is not as if we are being kind

and generous by bringing them here. In fact, it is more than a two-way street. We are in fact the winners. For this reason one has to wonder about some of the comments which have been made by some of those who spoke in the debate before me and who boasted about the tremendous job that is being done when we consider the following from the Canadian Bureau for International Education which notes:

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—that while a great number of Canadians have come to recognize the importance of international education, nobody seems willing or able to contribute financially. Although all levels of government have now joined education, business, and cultural groups with verbal support of international education, little is being done in concrete terms. The number of international students in Canada has decreased by 43 per cent in four years. Opportunities for Canadians to participate in study and exchanges abroad are diminishing.

We may hear glowing reports with respect to some of the steps we are taking, and I am pleased to say that whatever is being done is certainly good and a contribution. However, the strange thing is that the policies which we are pursuing are not enlightened ones. They are not even self-serving. They are destructive. We are literally watching an industry diminish. That is to say we are watching this educational industry diminish. From a purely pragmatic point of view I suggest that the Government urgently needs to re-examine this matter with great energy.

The Canadian Bureau for International Education states that a national strategy is lacking. I hope members of the Government will take note of its assessment which states:

A national strategy is lacking. A host of impediments continue to deter prospective students from coming to Canada. There is no systematic approach for providing foreign nationals with information on study in Canada or for providing Canadians with information on study and exchanges abroad.

I am quoting from a brief presented by the Canadian Bureau for International Education to the Standing Committee on Secretary of State. This is the business of the Bureau and it has made recommendations to the Government. I am pleased to observe that the Standing Committee on Secretary of State has taken note of these concerns and is addressing itself vigorously to a concern about the way in which we can assist in developing nations the whole question of human resources and the development of those resources in those countries. Surely one of the most important ways in which Canada can contribute is to help with the educational concerns of these people in these countries. That may mean bringing students to Canada. It may mean bringing them not merely to universities but also to technical schools and community colleges, any institution of education in Canada, be it private or public. It also means that Canadians must be entrepreneurs in a way and go forward into those countries in order to bring educational facilities and opportunities to them so that they may develop themselves more fully. Whichever way it is there is an urgent need for us to address ourselves to this subject.

I commend the Hon. Member who brought forward this motion. I commend those from the government benches who agree with it. I only regret that the motion will probably not