

problems resulting from family breakdowns and so on. It is a very serious Canadian problem. Those identified in the category of illiterate are high risk when it comes to poverty, unemployment and when it comes to having personal problems. Very often all three are combined.

I want to talk for a moment on poverty and illiteracy. Canada, like most other countries, is still a long way from breaking the vicious cycle of poverty leading to inadequate education, meagre job opportunities and continued poverty into the next generation and the generation after so that we will have a second and third generation of illiterate people. The cost is high economically and socially. No country can afford it.

Unemployment is another factor associated directly with illiteracy. The connection between illiteracy and unemployment in western democracies has been well established. The higher an individual's educational attainment, that is to say the farther he or she moves away from illiteracy, the better chance he has to join the labour force, the more likely he or she is to avoid unemployment, the more likely that he or she will have a better job with an opportunity to attain higher lifetime earnings. Simply put, the better educated one is, the better chance of finding a job. When people have jobs, everybody in the country gains. Those who do not possess a functional level of literacy are and will remain the least likely to be employed. If they do not find a job, opportunities for advancement are not possible resulting in low self esteem and the problems which accompany that feeling of limited worth.

The federal Government has provided funds through the Department of Secretary of State to support voluntary community based initiatives for literacy and literacy training. But that really is not a commitment. There is no concerted effort. It is one of those on-again off-again approaches to a very serious problem. It is never going to correct the problem of illiteracy in Canada. The Speech from the Throne in 1986 committed the federal Government to work with the provinces, the private sector and voluntary organizations to develop resources to ensure that Canadians have access to literary skills. That was in 1986. They were very fine words but that is all. No action followed.

On September 8, 1988—a critical time since an election campaign was on and the Government's interest was

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intense then—the federal Government announced its intention to invest \$110 million over five years to fight illiteracy in Canada. That works out to \$5 over five years for everyone classified as being illiterate in Canada. That is like sprinkling a little bit of water out in the Sahara Desert, a real tokenism as I described it earlier. Several years ago it was easy for Canadians to be complacent about this. They assumed that their country was one of the best educated societies in the world. Recent studies have shown, however, that a substantial proportion of the Canadian public is now functionally illiterate and that the national cost of this is enormous.

We are proud of how successful we have been in teaching our two founding languages to great numbers of Canadians, but we failed miserably to teach one in five Canadians who are over 15 years of age to read and write in just one of our official languages. It is a reflection of the lack of priority on the part of the Government.

The Government's response to illiteracy requires commitment. It requires input from all sections of society. In devising this response, illiteracy should be recognized as a complex, long term social and cultural problem that requires money and research. It would be put on the basis of a consistent amount of money based on our Gross Domestic Product, an item which has all but disappeared on the scale of spending on the part of this Government.

The cost of illiteracy to business in Canada is horrendous. From that point of view alone, fighting illiteracy should be looked upon as an investment. Unskilled and what we refer to as muscle work is declining. It is in that group that you will find most illiterates. Technology demands are increasing and the new skills necessary are beyond the comprehension of most of the illiterates. The problems feed upon themselves and compound upon themselves. Good communications skills which are ever increasing are beyond most illiterates. Industrial accidents are higher among illiterates.

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Let us consider some of the everyday things which most of us take for granted but which illiterate people cannot do. These include reading directions on a bottle of medicine and the potential pursuant problems; filling out a cheque correctly or completing some simple business transaction, or following a route on a map.