

Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act

the action now being taken by the Government flies in the face of that commitment. If it is the position of the federal Government that its role in more equitably distributing opportunities for fair and equal access to health care is to be diminished, then I think it should say so. If the Government believes it is reasonable either to transfer more of the burden of cost to the provinces, or to transfer more of the burden of cost to individuals and families, then I think we have a basic and fundamental disagreement here in the House of Commons.

As I listen to the arguments infrequently put forward by government Members and their supporters with regard to why this is a useful piece of legislation, I cannot help but feel that the Government has not yet come to grips with the reality of the situation. If we are to transfer more of the burden from the federal to the provincial levels of Government, that will inevitably mean that most provinces where there is not an adequate tax base today will have to reduce the level of health care facilities, and, therefore, the level of health care they deliver to their citizens. I would have thought, and I say to those Ministers who are present—both of them—that, given that they come from regions of the country which fall into the category of needing a more fair distribution of the national wealth, the argument I am now making would have been put forward by them. I would not be surprised if it was put forward, which may well have happened in the secrecy of a cabinet meeting. Of course, that is something we do not know. However, it is something which is not being advanced here in the House of Commons.

I wish to say to the Minister of National Revenue (Mr. MacKay) that one of the problems which will now flow from the decision being taken by the Government is that families in the less-advantaged provinces, which even in this day and age still do not have the same degree of access to health care which families in the more affluent areas have, will have even less access. They will not even be able to enjoy the somewhat more limited access which they had previously enjoyed. Frankly, I do not think that is in the best interests of co-operative federalism. I do not happen to believe it is consistent with the nature of the country. I feel that the Government should take this piece of legislation—well, I could tell it what to do with it—but it should at least rethink it before it does anything with it.

I say this because there is a serious problem emerging. I suggest that the problem I identify in health care will be felt equally in the area of post-secondary education. The Minister knows that the families of fishermen have enough trouble now scraping together the necessary dollars to allow their offspring to go to a university or college of their choice in order to improve the quality of life beyond that which their forefathers enjoyed. I think that is fair to say. I do not think I would get any disagreement on that point. It is something which is equally true of the families of loggers and of miners. In fact, it is now becoming true for those families who reside in the built-up areas of the country. By reducing the level of increase in

transfer payments, thereby reducing the amount of money available to the provinces, and thereby reducing the amount of money available for post-secondary education, tuition fees will have to rise. If tuition fees rise I know, as do all Members, that in terms of income, many marginal families which were scraping together the money to allow their children to go on to what they hoped would be a better quality of life through a better education will no longer be able to afford to do that. I suggest to the Government that the rest of Canada is prepared to assume the necessary responsibility for ensuring that that will not be the consequence of the action the Government is taking. It need not and should not be the consequence of the new direction of this Government.

I would like to put forward Ontario as an example. The Province of Ontario is economically diverse. As everyone knows, some areas are more affluent than others. Some areas of the province have easy access to health care and education while others have less easy access. In some cases, access is very difficult to achieve. Children in areas where access is less easy, or where economic deprivation exists, and who by virtue of support programs offered through a variety of different means, but which are no longer being offered because of the economic downturn which has taken place in many of these areas, will be doomed to a life not at all unlike the life which their parents decided was not adequate for them because they had already had to live it. They will not be able to improve their lot. They will not be able to provide Canada with the benefits of a more highly-educated society.

Over the next five years the Province of Ontario will lose \$2.014 billion as a result of the proposed cuts. Where will the province go to find \$2.014 billion? How many hospital beds will have to be eliminated, and in what communities? How many places in universities will have to be cut as a result of the loss of this revenue? How many youngsters will not be able to continue with their education because they will not be able to attend institutions as a result of fee increases which will inevitably take place? How many people will knock on hospital doors with illnesses which require hospitalization, only to be turned away because the hospital will not be able to provide the level of service which it had been providing previously? I might add that this is a level of service which has been diminishing systematically over the last five or six years.

In closing, I say that I am puzzled by the way the Government has set its priorities. I am concerned that the Government does not recognize that the taxpayers at the federal level are, indeed, the taxpayers at the provincial level. They are one and the same. EPF is intended to distribute more equitably the tax base in such a way as to guarantee basic services in areas of greatest need. That is what we were all committed to when we decided to become a country. That is what we in the Parliament of Canada have been committed to over the many years Parliament has been operating. That is what we in this party remain committed to. That is what I thought the Conservative Party was committed to when it sat in opposition.