

Office of Education

One of the sad things about education in western Canada is the loss of appreciation of great names in Canadian history such as Champlain, Maisonneuve, Jacques Cartier, even La Vérendrye who broke through to the west—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member but his allotted time has expired.

Mr. Mark MacGuigan (Windsor-Walkerville): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak against the motion moved by the hon. member for Vaudreuil (Mr. Herbert) that the government should consider the advisability of establishing an office of education. I believe at this time when we are all concerned about fostering national unity that such a move would probably be regarded with deep distrust as an intrusion by the Government of Canada into an area of provincial responsibility. It could only serve to widen the gulf between the different levels of government rather than pulling us closer together, as seems to be necessary today.

I realize, as the hon. member for Vaudreuil said in his careful and balanced address, that if his motion is read carefully it does not really impinge upon provincial rights in the field of education, and that it is not his intention to do so. I am afraid the symbolism is against him, however. The creation of such an office would symbolize a federal intention to intrude in this provincial area of jurisdiction. That is my concern and that is why I cannot go along with the motion.

Historically, at the time of confederation the Government of Canada played no role in education in Canadian society and the British North America Act placed the responsibility for education with provincial governments. The Government of Canada has been and is directly responsible for education in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, in the armed forces, in the penitentiary service, and for the education of Canada's native peoples.

Throughout our nation's history there have been many occasions on which the Government of Canada has been called upon to play an active role in educational developments. For example, the Government of Canada became involved in education in response to the educational demands of industrialization in the early 1900s, to the demands of veterans returning from two world wars, and to the enormous expansion of post-secondary enrolments in the 1960s. In each case, participation by the Government of Canada was effected without usurping the authority of provincial governments and for the benefit of the country as a whole.

In 1966, Prime Minister Pearson clearly stated the position of the Government of Canada with respect to education. He said:

Education is, under our constitution, a matter of provincial jurisdiction. The federal government does not dispute this or wish in any way to do so. At the same time, education is obviously a matter of profound importance to the economic and social growth of the country as a whole . . . the federal government accepts primary responsibility for employment and economic activity generally in the country. We recognize that provincial governments share our concern in these matters and pursue these common aims in the conduct of their own affairs.

● (1642)

That is the end of the quotation from Prime Minister Pearson. I believe that the federal government's objectives have not changed since that time. I believe that a review of the history of the involvement of the Government of Canada in education will demonstrate clearly that this involvement has occurred without usurping the constitutional rights of the provincial authorities.

Participation by the Government of Canada in education dates back at least to 1876 when, in an effort to train more Canadians to serve as army officers, the Royal Military College was established at Kingston. Another early step was a 150,000 acre land endowment to the University of Manitoba in 1885, as provision for capital expenditures and establishment of a permanent source of revenue for the university. Although these early steps were of considerable significance, federal involvement was still quite limited in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Indeed, at that time education was considered to be a family responsibility and participation was largely determined by social status and religious belief. Public responsibility extended only to elementary schooling, and secondary schools, which were usually supported by religious organizations, were reserved to train future elites.

There was additional pressure on the Government of Canada in the early 1900s. This was linked specifically to the flow of young people from farms to cities, which began to jeopardize agricultural production, and to the shortage of skilled manpower in manufacturing industries. Following requests for action from business and labour, the Government of Canada appointed the Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Vocational Education in 1910.

The work of the commission resulted in important legislation: the Agricultural Aid Act of 1912 and the Agricultural Instruction Act of 1913. The former supplied grants to provinces to develop agricultural education and techniques; the latter specifically gave assistance for training directly to the three existing veterinary colleges and indirectly, by channelling funds through the provinces, to agricultural colleges. This was the genesis of channelling federal aid for education through provincial governments.

In 1916, as a result of Canada's war involvement and a desire to improve research and development, the federal government formed the National Research Council. Initially, this was an effort to co-ordinate government research programs. During World War II, the National Research Council played a vital role in co-ordinating and conducting scientific research. The council now has an extensive program of grants and fellowships.

When the federal government established the Dominion Bureau of Statistics in 1918, provision was made for a division to be concerned with education statistics. The education division published its first statistical report in 1921, and it has expanded its services and publications considerably since then.

The economic depression of the 1930s served to identify a major problem within the secondary school system. On leaving