

*The Budget—Mr. Regan*

the 1982-83 level or forced to follow other methods of providing support to post-secondary education. I want to express confidence that it is quite possible for the provinces and the national government together to work out satisfactory answers to these problems so that we can achieve a new agreement and a plan for improving the funding and the very structure of post-secondary education before the deadline of April, 1983.

The final element of the strategy involves taking action at the federal level to work toward more effective decision-making and a wider participation in developing policies relating to post-secondary education and human resource development. As part of this review, the process of policy-making in the area of human resource development has too often suffered from a lack of mechanisms whereby all the relevant interests could be represented. The two parliamentary task force reports that I referred to have addressed the problem of decision-making in this area. The recommendations of these reports will be considered very carefully.

In the immediate future I am undertaking a comprehensive review of federal support of post-secondary education. I plan to consult with provinces, with post-secondary organizations and with student and faculty organizations with a view to establishing a means of allowing all parties to have an input to federal policy in this area and with a view to ensuring that stronger national voices are brought to bear upon decision-making in the field of post-secondary education. I also want to say that we are keenly interested in encouraging a somewhat larger involvement by the private sector in post-secondary decision-making.

I would like to conclude by noting the same concern that has been expressed to me by students and representatives of colleges and universities about the future of the post-secondary education system in our country. They all know that there must be changes, that for the system to be relevant it cannot stand on the status quo now any more than at any time in the past. It is a system that has grown and evolved as our needs as a nation required. There have been cutbacks in post-secondary spending in some provinces and there is evidence of deterioration in some aspects of the post-secondary capacity. The federal government recognizes the difficulties that are being faced and we are determined to help overcome them.

● (1630)

The federal government, the Government of Canada, will not cut back on the budget it devotes to human resource programs. It sees them as a great priority in relation to the future wellbeing and wealth of our nation and our citizens. Indeed, by making changes which ensure that federal funds actually reach the education system, and by encouraging others to maintain an equitable share in financing, federal action could increase the total funding devoted to human resource development in Canada. Further, the federal government is prepared to consider strengthening its programs to aid those students that are faced with legitimate financial difficulties. In times of inflation that can be a special problem.

I also want to note that I am concerned, from a point of view of accessibility, with regional inequities and the fact that there are regions and provinces in Canada which have not been able, for one reason or another, to produce as high a percentage of university graduates or highly skilled people as others. I think that is a problem that needs to be addressed.

I also think that the formula under which money has been distributed has perhaps been unfair to some provinces that have tended to have an influx of students from other areas. Adjustment is inevitable and needed. The post-secondary system must remain flexible to meet the changing needs of the Canadian economy and of society.

All developed countries today are facing important challenges with respect to human resource development, not just Canada. The same type of reassessment and policy review is happening in many countries. At a recent OECD conference, for example, participants discussed common challenges resulting from tightened budgets in post-secondary institutions, from ensuring that the post-secondary education remains responsive to the needs of society, and from the growing demands for continuing education for adults.

In Canada, we are addressing these challenges and opportunities from a special position of strength. Our post-secondary system underwent a remarkable and successful expansion in the 1960s and, despite setbacks in some areas, the system remains basically strong. Canada is a leader in many of the technologies that are changing the nature of education and training. With our abundance of natural resources, the economic benefits of a qualified labour force are especially strong in Canada.

In cultural terms, the benefits of a strong education system are also especially high in Canada, where graduates are able to live and work in a multicultural, bilingual country that has a strong network of social and cultural institutions. The strengthening of Canada as a nation and the enhanced wellbeing of Canadians depends on the success of our collective approach to human resource development. The federal government is determined to play a strong and responsible role in this collective endeavour. As I have stressed, we are anxious that the provinces also meet their responsibilities.

The message from this budget on education is that the Government of Canada is committed to the improvement of post-secondary education. It places a high priority on post-secondary education and is determined to elicit a similar commitment from the provinces.

**Mr. Thacker:** Mr. Speaker, would the minister permit one short question?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker):** Let me settle a couple of matters first. The minister had completed the time allotted to him. Therefore, I would have to seek the consent of the House in order to allow a question to be put to him.

There may be an offer to defer to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Pinard), who also wants to raise a point of order. Therefore, if I see a nod of agreement from hon. members,