

Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, this is a very dark day for Canada—

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Riis: —and it is not because it is late at night. Bill C-96 is an Act to amend the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements and Federal Post-Secondary Education and Health Contributions Act, 1977. It should be entitled “the Conservative Government hacks away at post-secondary education and at care for the ill across the country”. Frankly, the Bill is anti-people. It is an anti-youth Bill, and it discriminates against the poor regions.

Mr. Friesen: When are you going to say “ordinary Canadians”?

Mr. Riis: It also discriminates against ordinary Canadians, generally speaking.

This is an extremely serious situation. Tonight we are debating whether or not to proceed with a Bill which, over the next five years including 1986, will see a reduction in payments for post-secondary education and health care to the provinces of Canada totalling some \$5,600 million or \$5.6 billion.

Mr. Deans: That much?

Mr. Riis: Yes. It is an incredible amount of money; it is an unbelievable amount of money. It is a very clear indication of the priority of the Government. We have heard many Hon. Members across the aisle say that they cannot afford to improve the education of Canadians, both young and old, and that they cannot afford to provide decent health care for Canadians. However, there are all kinds of other things they can afford.

Mr. Deans: What are they?

Mr. Riis: I hear the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans). I do not have the time to give a long list tonight, but I should like to refer to two or three examples. It took one weekend for the Government to find \$1 billion to bail out two banks.

Mr. Deans: One billion dollars!

Mr. Riis: Yes, \$1,000 million in one weekend to bail out major depositors including the Bank of America, Citibank, the Bank of Hong Kong, and the Bank of Korea.

Mr. Deans: Where did they get the money?

Mr. Riis: They got the money from the people of Canada. They said that \$1,000 million for the bank bail-out was a priority, as was the \$1,000 million for Dome Petroleum and the \$1,000 million for the Gulf takeover. However, they did not have any money for education or additional health care.

Mr. Deans: For sick people.

Mr. Riis: Yes, for sick people.

Mr. Deans: They would give money to the banks but not to the young people?

Mr. Riis: That is correct, they would give money to the banks, mainly to foreign banks, but not to the young people of Canada. The priorities of the Government are very clear.

What makes it particularly troublesome for some of us, people like myself who represent constituencies in the Province of British Columbia, is that the province happens to be ruled by a Party which is anti-youth, anti-people, and anti-education. They are called the Socreds or the Social Credit Party of Canada.

Mr. Benjamin: They are the same as the Conservatives.

Mr. Riis: That is right. They are the same as the Conservatives in many respects.

Mr. Deans: In fact a Conservative is running for the leadership.

Mr. Riis: The Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain has made an interesting point. In fact, a number of Conservatives are actually running for the leadership of the Social Credit Party. I suspect there is an obvious linkage there. In any event, it has been anti-education for many years. As a result, I know of an instance in my constituency where a science class of 120 students is studying and has 26 textbooks to share. Another biology class, which obviously has advanced significantly in the knowledge of biology in the last few years, has a text book which is 18 years out of date or 18 years old. This is the kind of education to which they are subjected because the Socreds cannot afford education. As I said, the Conservatives have said that they cannot afford decent education in the country.

Let me put it into some context. First I refer to post-secondary education. Let us look at the top 20 OECD countries or the top western industrialized nations, as they are perhaps more commonly called, and at the money which they are putting into education, research, and development. All of them except one is investing more than ever before in post-secondary education. What country of all the western industrialized nations is cutting back on those investments? What country is cutting back investment in the most important resource of any country, namely, the human resource of a country? It is Canada. Of all OECD countries, Canada has failed to invest in its most important resource—the people of Canada.

Let us also look at the provinces, in particular the province which has failed to invest in these areas more than any other province. It is the Province of British Columbia. Not only do Canadians get the short end of the stick internationally, but people from British Columbia get the short end of the little stick in Canada. When you look within the Province of British Columbia and at which people get the short end of the British Columbia educational stick, it is those who have to live outside