

Federal-Provincial Arrangements Act

Mr. Robert P. Kaplan (Don Valley): Mr. Speaker, I wish to say a few words on the subject which was raised in this debate by the hon. member for Fundy-Royal (Mr. Fairweather) and by my colleague from Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Blair). This is a subject which was raised when the bill was discussed in the finance committee. It is a subject which has caused me such concern that I have debated earnestly with myself whether I should support the amendment now before us. I find it difficult to understand the amendment although it has been explained to me. I understand it generally.

I have another reservation in respect of this package which is Bill C-8. After all, it is a package proposal. It has been introduced following negotiations. In a sense, it is a document negotiated between the federal government and provincial governments. For that reason I have decided to support the legislation. However, I must tell the Minister of State (Mr. Mahoney) of my grave concern over the situation which the federal government is proposing. I ask the minister if he can assure us that the government is equally concerned about this problem. In the 24 months' period of the present arrangements is there some hope of raising this matter with the provinces? In other words, will the position that I will describe in a moment be brought forward and, hopefully, will something be done about it?

First let me tell the House what the problem is. Under the present fiscal arrangements which are being continued for five years under this legislation we, on behalf of the taxpayers of Canada, pay half the costs of operating the universities of this country. That is to say, universities are administered in the normal way, the provincial ministers are responsible for the contributions which their governments make, the provincial governments determine the extent of university operating costs and the taxpayers of Canada, through the federal parliament, pay half the bill.

Times have changed since I went to university, and that was not too long ago. However, when witnesses from the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada appeared before us I learned something I did not know, namely, that a policy is developing throughout this country, and in some places it is being implemented of charging higher fees for university students who come from outside the province. This is a proposal in Quebec and British Columbia. A student from another part of Canada who comes to a university in those provinces will be charged \$2,500, for example, for one year's tuition whereas a student resident in the province may be charged only \$400 or \$500 for exactly the same course.

• (2010)

I can understand why the provinces are doing this. I understand why pressure is being put on the universities to restrict entrance, in effect, to residents of their province. It is an entirely fiscal problem, the problem of financing the universities, but I suggest it is a self-defeating operation. In the long run, provinces which exclude out-of-province students by charging very high fees will find their policies being adopted by other provinces. We will end up with a situation where Canadian students will not be able to travel to universities which they would like to attend, because of barriers created by provincial poli-

[The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel).]

cies in the field of education. I oppose these policies and as a Canadian I am very concerned about them. It is good for our universities to welcome students from all parts of Canada and, although it is another issue, they should welcome students from outside our country. It enriches our university community and our country to have this kind of mix. In a country that is concerned about national unity and is as diverse and widespread as ours, for the federal government to watch a development taking place that will prevent students from across this country from having maximum access to higher education is completely wrong.

I know the other argument, that education is a provincial matter. We know the problems that developed when Premier Duplessis refused to accept very nominal amounts offered by the federal government because of the fear they might be followed up by conditions as to the way the money should be spent. Such conditions might be imposed but I say this without hesitation because of my concern that the provinces are embarking on a course that is destructive of national unity. This course will weaken our universities and will weaken Canada; I object to this arrangement.

I would like the federal government to do something about this, but on the other hand I understand it is a negotiated agreement. It will last for only two years so I do not intend to oppose it. I would like to know that the government of Canada is concerned about this problem and that we will not support universities which have a policy of excluding Canadians living outside a province from attending university in the province. I do not think the taxpayers of Canada want that kind of policy to develop. I understand why the provinces are doing this. I know the position they are in, but I do not think we who represent the people of Canada should sit back, pay half the bill and let this development take place.

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, although this is my amendment, by arrangement with my colleague, the hon. member for Fundy-Royal (Mr. Fairweather), I let him speak first. To that extent I have drawn some opprobrium as to the nature of my amendment. I want to point out to hon. members who may be baffled by some of the complexities of procedural amendments, and so forth, what I have done. As a matter of fact, the Chair has reversed the position of my amendments. Amendment No. 2 should have been No. 1; that would have made quite clear my purpose in introducing the amendments.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) and one or two members have wondered about my amendment which appears as No. 1. If there had not been that amendment—it is about the only possible amendment having to do with this feature of education—they could not have made their speeches at this stage. It was for the purpose of bringing forward the point of view that hon. members have expressed supporting the cause of AUCC in this House; otherwise, it would only have appeared in the transcript of the proceedings of the finance committee which is read by a miniscule number of persons. In fact, it only appeared at ten o'clock this morning.

This is a point of view that has found favour. The purpose of this amendment was to give us the framework