

Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act

were not given in some courses because it was too expensive to provide the necessary printed material. On and on it goes. We heard stories about how the physical plants at universities were deteriorating. There are myriad stories about archaic laboratory equipment, microscopes without lenses, and chemicals which were not available for conducting laboratory experiments and exercises.

● (1520)

Apart from the issue of the deteriorating state of the physical plant and equipment in the universities, in these many reports published recently we have recommendations to meet the financial exigencies of the universities that all too often lead to recommendations that would restrict further accessibility to universities. Several universities, for example, the University of Toronto and the University of Waterloo, have increased the requirements for entry. I am sure I do not have to indicate to you, Sir, that as soon as these kinds of restrictions are imposed on admissibility to universities, both in standards for admission and in increased tuition cost, as has so often been recommended, we will be moving back to an era in which accessibility is limited to the sons and daughters of the wealthy who can afford it.

In the absence of adequate means by which we can support students in their studies, in the absence of adequate grant programs in the face of increased costs for tuition, fees, books and so on, we have a situation where it is not going to be unusual, indeed at present it is not unusual, to find students who at the end of their university or college careers are ending up having to repay a debt that may amount to almost \$40,000. That is a serious matter, Mr. Speaker.

There is not only the issue of the social justice of accessibility to ensure that all young people will have adequate opportunity, there is also the issue that the Government should understand, namely, if it intends to pursue the kind of future economic development its economic strategy contemplates then it should be conscious of the need not to cut transfer payments to the provinces. The Government should be doing what should have been done a long time ago. It should be working on an arrangement with the provinces by which colleges and universities would be ensured of adequate levels of funding, making it possible for young people to attend colleges and universities even if their parents are not endowed with particular wealth.

I said earlier that the Government persists in stating that this Bill does not represent a cut over the next five years in financing post-secondary education. I said also that Members opposite were engaged in debate when the previous Government introduced Bill C-97 and Bill C-12 which had similar effects. I cite that to emphasize that it is not just this Government that has failed to meet its responsibilities to meet the needs of post-secondary education, but that there has been a general pattern at the federal level of diminishing levels of financing for post-secondary education.

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that up until 1977 the cost of post-secondary education and health was cost shared with the provinces on a 50-50 basis. Since that time, the federal share has dropped from 48 per cent to 41 per cent. With the enactment of this legislation, the level of the federal share on a percentage basis will decrease further so that it is only 36 per cent.

Let me point out that if we look at the annual increases in over-all provincial post-secondary education spending from 1977-78 to 1984-85, we will find that the rate of increase has just barely kept pace with the inflation rate. That at first appearances would seem to suggest that post-secondary education funding has not done too badly, but the costs for post-secondary education have increased at a rate far in excess of the Consumer Price Index, which is the basis for comparison that I cited. That the universities and colleges of this land are in horrible shape is easily explainable on the basis of decreased levels of funding and a lack of commitment on the part of the federal Government, and of the provinces, I must say in some measure, to begin to address the problem in a fashion that would lead to the kind of solution we must have.

We need to produce a strong university system, and not one, as has in recent weeks been so often described, that is becoming third rate. When the very best university in our country is measured, not against all of the universities in the world but only those universities outside of the United States, and it rates seventeenth, then surely we have a serious problem. When the very best university has to close its architectural school, that further dramatizes the horrible state in which we are and the much worse state we will be in if we do not begin to address the problem.

We cannot have a technological future, a future based on manufacturing, something that goes beyond our natural resources as a means for economic growth, if we do not declare some kind of commitment to ensure that universities are enhanced rather than weakened, not only as educational institutions but as research institutions.

In closing, I can do no better than to read the following question: The Minister is prepared to cut spending in two very important areas. He is prepared to risk major cutbacks in medical care and post-secondary education. Rather than rush into this on a unilateral basis, force spending cuts and service cuts on the provinces, would the Minister consider entering into two or three national conferences on health and post-secondary education? We can then set out the national objectives of the various levels of Government in these two important areas before we cut spending, before we cause hospital closures and cutbacks in postsecondary education. That question was posed by the present Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson). It was a reasonable question. His premise was excellent and it is a premise that I recommend to him.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): Questions or comments. Debate. The Hon. Member for Sudbury.

Mr. Hovdebo: Mr. Speaker, I wanted to ask a question.