

[English]

It is remarkable to think how many people in Canada miss the marvellous goings-on that take place in the House of Commons on quiet afternoons like this one. It is an experience which few people want to miss to see the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry (Mr. Axworthy) praying for the Conservative Party to get on its knees to thank the Liberal Party for the great prosperity which was left to it when it took office. Perhaps it is an even more shocking experience for Canadians to listen to the Hon. Member for Western Arctic (Mr. Nickerson) talk about the mandate given the Conservative Party when it reached power. Of course, the mandate with which it reached power was a mandate directly and completely contrary to what the Government is now planning to do with respect to this piece of legislation.

For those who have been trying to make sense of what is taking place here today, for the last 45 minutes or an hour there has been a debate between a very black pot and a very black kettle, each attempting to point out how dark and dingy the other is. We are talking about a reduction which has gradually taken place since 1977 in the level of support provided by the federal Government to the provincial Governments.

Looking at the percentages of support the federal Government provided to the provinces in 1977-78, the federal share of health and post-secondary education financing was 48.7 per cent, almost 50 per cent. At that time, the Liberal Party began to reduce systematically the amount of money which was to be made available for the provinces to provide these basic services to Canadians. By 1982-83 the figure had fallen to 42.6 per cent, reflecting the elimination of a revenue guarantee which provinces had enjoyed in the past. By 1985-86 the figure was much the same when the Conservative Party took power. Then the Conservative Party, with a mandate to return to the percentages of 1977, instead followed precisely in the footsteps of the Liberal Party before it by cutting back yet further the amount of direct financial assistance provided to the provinces for these basic services.

According to the statistics, by 1988-89, 39 per cent of the cost of health and post-secondary education will be covered by federal expenditures. By 1990-91 only 36 per cent will be covered. In other words, we started off in 1977 with about half of these crucial expenditures covered by the federal Government and we will end up in 1990-91 with just over one-third of them being covered.

The Hon. Member for Western Arctic can make the case that this is not a cut and the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry can make the case that this is all the fault of the Conservatives, but the actual fact of which the people of Canada should be aware is that this has been a systematic attack, first by the Liberals and then by the Conservatives, on the capacity of the provinces to provide for health and post-secondary education services.

Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act

Perhaps money spent on health and post-secondary education is looked upon by some Hon. Members as wasted money, as money that goes down the drain. That seems in fact to be the philosophy that has been followed in the attempt to cut back support by the other two Parties in the House. In fact, such expenditures are anything but wasted. They are anything but an attempt to lose possibilities for Canada. Above all it is an investment just like any company makes; only in this case it is an investment by a country in the skills and abilities of its people. In the case of health, it is an investment in the workforce, students, and retired people who will be better off. As a consequence of this investment, they will be able to contribute better to the country. In the case of post-secondary education, it is even more clear-cut. We are talking about an investment in the institutions and agencies which provide people with the skill and ability to make a contribution to society and to be competitive in the future international economy.

● (1630)

These cut-backs have taken place systematically from 1977. They are in fact counter-productive to the future of Canada. They are ripping away at the very basis of our future. They are, to use an old English cliché, very much pound foolish and penny wise. They are attempting to cut back in areas where cut-backs will have devastating effects upon the future of our young people and upon the future of our workforce, indeed upon the future of our entire population.

At this point I should like to talk about mandates. The Conservative Party of Canada fought cut-backs when it was in opposition. It said that cut-backs would have a damaging effect upon the country. For instance, the PC campaign handbook for the 1984 election specifically indicated the PC position in respect of post-secondary education. In part it read:

We would return to the 1977 funding formula though we cannot compensate the provinces for their six and five funding losses.

Perhaps it was nice of the Conservatives to admit that they would not compensate the provinces for past losses, but at least there should have been honesty. They should have said to Canadians that if they were given a mandate to do it, they intended to cut back even further than the Liberal cut-backs of the past.

Every Canadian has suffered and will suffer as a result of the cut-backs. I could take you, Mr. Speaker, through province by province to give examples of the kinds of cut-backs which have occurred in hospitals and universities. In fact, ordinary Canadians are bearing the burden for what has taken place. However, it is particularly striking to see the consequences of the effort of the Conservatives to accelerate cut-backs and to take cut-backs yet one step further. I should like to quote from a letter which one of our representatives received from Robert Bourassa, the Premier of Quebec.

[Translation]

You probably know—

—Mr. Bourassa was saying—