

Oral Questions

to encourage them to improve their skills and knowledge in order to be able to get into the work force.

The hon. member would be well advised before criticizing Canada's youth to look at youth achievement—

Mr. Speaker: I believe we must move on.

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EDUCATION

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister of employment.

The Economic Council of Canada report published today makes clear that this government is presiding over the development of a two-tier education system in Canada. One system, a slightly higher quality education system sustained by the richer provinces and another system, a lower quality education system barely sustained by the poorer provinces.

Does the minister think it is acceptable, coming from Atlantic Canada himself, that Atlantic Canadian students consistently demonstrate lower academic performance in the maths and the sciences and demonstrate a lower level of literacy in large part because of the \$9 billion in education transfer cuts right across this country?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member would not want to induce anyone in error. When he refers to cuts, I challenge him to look at the figures for transfers to education in Atlantic Canada. I will bet—I will not do that; it is illegal.

An hon. member: Tomorrow it won't be.

Mr. Valcourt: I will not drive, either.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Valcourt: I will tell the hon. member that we are just as much concerned as we can be with the question of the level of education in Atlantic Canada, and for that matter in all of Canada.

When we consider that last year 300,000 jobs went unfilled in Canada because people did not have the

skills, we know we have a problem. That is why the prosperity initiative has produced a discussion paper where we invite all Canadians to be part of the solution.

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is for the same minister.

The minister knows the report today makes clear that Atlantic Canadians, when it comes to the quality of education they have access to, are fast becoming second-class citizens of this country.

In light of the clear evidence in this report, and I quote, "in light of the fact that provincial governments in Atlantic Canada are clearly struggling simply to maintain their educational system", what are this minister and this government going to do to restore access to all Canadians in every region to quality education?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, as a graduate of a maritime university I must take the responsibility—

Mr. Fontana: Now we know what's wrong with you.

Mr. Mulroney: I want to point out for the House of Commons that a Liberal member of Parliament just said: "Now we know what's wrong with Canada".

Mr. Fontana: I said you, not Canada.

Mr. Mulroney: This is a terrible statement for all of Atlantic Canada.

Some hon. members: Shame, shame.

Mr. Mulroney: In fact this may break my hon. Liberal friend's heart, but Coline and I are graduates of the same university.

Mr. Howard McCurdy (Windsor—St. Clair): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister.

In its swan song the Economic Council identified the fact that Canada is not number one in education or training.

• (1440)

What does the government plan to do about the fact that Canadian kids are not number one in preparation for entering school or leaving school, not number one in terms of vocational training, not number one in terms of numeracy, literacy or science skills, not number one with