

Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina West): Mr. Speaker, I want to join in this debate, and I have to confess to the House in case some of my hon. colleagues did not have the privilege of hearing me before, that this is my fourth time. I attempted on the previous three occasions to try, at least with my limited capacity of humour, to humour them into doing the right thing, to try to live up to their own words and their own commitments.

There is a longstanding phrase going back many decades and centuries that says: "A man is as good as his word." Today we would say "A person is as good as their word." Of course, that expression implies that if you give your word, whether you are an individual, a corporation, a political party, or a government, you must be as good as your word. I refer to the words and the word of the Party of the Government in power and the word of the present Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) when he was Leader of the Official Opposition. They gave their word in the media and in their own literature that the Conservative Party would return to the 1977 funding formula for post-secondary education and health care. No one in the country of any political persuasion disagreed with that.

● (2120)

The outfit that started all this was the Liberal Party when it was in power. The Liberals were the ones who wrecked the 1977 formula. I am glad they are having death-bed repentances. I appreciate the remarks of my colleagues to my immediate right. They are nice enough to admit in a roundabout way that they were wrong then. They have repented.

The Conservatives and members of my Party fought tooth and nail in the Chamber to maintain the 1977 funding formula. The Conservative Official Opposition of that day screamed about it and the same Conservative Party is now compounding the felony. That proves what we have said for many years in this place, that there ain't no difference. They both take money from the rich and votes from the poor and then promise to protect them from each other. If you are not as good as your word, whether you are an individual or a government, you are not good. If a government is not prepared to stand by its word, it is not a good government.

The decreases in the increases in the amount of moneys the provinces can expect to receive to serve their citizens properly again makes it apparent that this Government, like the previous Government, knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.

I listened with horror to the pronouncements of the previous speaker, the Hon. Member for Edmonton West (Mr. Dorin). He presented himself well. From my perspective he looks like he is about 21, but he sounded like he is 91. These are the new R.B. Bennetts and Charlie Dunnings of this world out of the 1920s and dirty thirties.

I want to call as a witness one who is not a member or supporter of my Party or of the Official Opposition. He is a member and supporter of long standing of the governing Party.

He is an honoured and respected citizen of this nation in many ways. I speak of the Hon. Mr. Justice Emmett Hall. He was speaking about funding for health care and secondary education and this drive for privatization, the move away from the responsibility of the nation and the citizenry as a whole. He said:

With privatization will come drastically increased costs particularly in the hospital field.

Canada now allocates 8.4 per cent of the GNP to all forms of health care. In the United States where privatization flourishes, it is 10.9 per cent for vastly inferior coverage.

That was not some raving socialist talking, that was Mr. Justice Emmett Hall. In this area the Government cries and pleads about the deficit. We have proposed several options that would result in no increase in the deficit. The nation would more equitably share in the funding required under the 50-50 formula for health care and education.

The Government is bringing in a minimum tax which the Prime Minister and my Leader agreed to during the last election campaign. If he and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) would add 1 per cent or even half of 1 per cent to that minimum tax, they will have all the funding they need to maintain and implement the 50-50 formula.

We have proposed another alternative which would not increase the deficit. The Government could charge only 3 per cent interest on deferred corporation taxes which now amount to approximately \$35 billion on the books of the nation. It would collect \$1 billion in interest, which would more than maintain the 50-50 formula. Once such a tax were imposed, you would be surprised at how fast corporations would pay their deferred corporation taxes. Otherwise none of it will be collected. My colleague, the Member for Kamloops—Shuswap (Mr. Riis) proposed three or four other options to maintain the level that the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party, and my Party all agreed to—a 50-50 sharing.

I look upon my friend, the Member for Prince George—Bulkley Valley (Mr. McCuish) as a man of his word. I expect him to insist that the Government to which he belongs lives up to its word. If its word is no good, the Government is no good. You are only as good as your word.

Aside from the decreases in the increases, it is apparent that the Government concerns itself little with the quality of services offered to the public or with the capacity of the provinces to improve and enlarge the hospital, university and medicare programs they presently have. Goodness knows, there is a lot more still to be done. The Government wants more done with less and calls that productivity. When you hinder universities, hospitals and medical care plans in their attempts to increase, improve and enlarge upon the services they can provide, that is not an increase in productivity.

● (2130)

Two people came to my office today about social housing. I asked what that had to do with medicare and secondary education. They said we have a lot of people who need to have