

Private Members' Business

tion in that field. It readily acknowledges the expertise of the various governments with respect to education.

Being a former Manitoba education minister, my colleague from St. Boniface is aware of that fact and fully conversant with the post-secondary education issue. Keeping in mind his experience in education, I am somewhat surprised that he chose to introduce this motion.

The better to appreciate the import of the motion before the House, Mr. Speaker, allow me to shed light on the situation by explaining how the present system works, for this will enable you to agree with me that the federal government has rather limited leeway.

The provinces were given jurisdiction over education in the 1867 Canadian Constitution. Pursuant to section 93, the provincial education departments hold direct control over primary and secondary schools as well as colleges in Canada. It follows that these departments are responsible for rating academic credits and diplomas awarded outside their respective provincial boundaries at all levels except for university studies.

Indeed universities are an exception to the rule. They are empowered to award diplomas to their students under their provincial charters which also authorize them to set entrance requirements and related procedures. Thus each institution can rate the academic standards of other universities, provinces or countries before enrolling a student. Universities are responsible for establishing equivalence scales governing interprovincial standards or those of other Canadian universities.

The problem raised by the hon. member for St. Boniface is not a major one. Furthermore, most universities recognize job experience and give students points accordingly. Mechanisms already exist at the university level.

In fact, the present system works quite well, which is borne out by the figures. Last year, more than 70,900 foreign students were studying here in Canada. Degree and credit equivalencies were evaluated under the existing system and did not seem to be a major problem. In addition to the impressive number of foreign students, large numbers of Canadians changed schools, colleges or universities and were admitted, on the basis of the credits they had acquired, to another educational institution.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for St. Boniface has a solid reputation in the field of education, and of course, when he was a deputy minister with the Government of Manitoba, his great expertise was recognized, and rightly so. However, like other members of the Liberal Party in this House, he has become obsessed with taking all the powers that belong to the provinces and transferring them to the central government, the Government of Canada. Members of the New Democratic Party have the same desire to abolish the powers of the provinces by transferring them to a strong central government. The Liberal leader has exactly the same tendency to claim that the provinces are not capable of acting responsibly and should be denied certain powers that should be transferred to the central government.

Mr. Speaker, you are signalling that my time has expired, and I must say I had some more interesting points to make. Unfortunately, the proposal made by the hon. member for St. Boniface cannot be accepted by this side of the House because we on this side fully respect the jurisdiction of all the provinces of this country over education.

[English]

Ms. Mary Clancy (Halifax): Mr. Speaker, I wish to say that in this matter of great importance, we too on this side of the House respect the provinces. We also see the need for immediate action on the suggestion of my hon. colleague from St. Boniface, who did not ask for a regulatory body. He asked for the beginning of dialogue and discussion in this matter.

Those of us involved in so-called real politics know that the politics of universities is sometimes even more arcane and difficult to deal with. If we are going to solve this problem in our universities, both nationally and internationally, we must begin as soon as humanly possible, and not let it bog down in discussion in this Chamber or between the provinces. The job needs to be done. We have seen what the problem is. Let's attack it and seek a solution.

Mr. Speaker: The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired. Pursuant to Standing Order 36(1), the order is dropped to the bottom of the list of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.