

Federal Transfers to Provinces

from underneath the university institutions. The government is going to shave \$1.5 billion from grants to provinces. In turn, the provinces will be forced to take that money out of health, educational and other programs. In other words, the government is going to tighten the vice. The government is doing this at the very time when the opposite is what is required.

I had the privilege today of being on a panel with a member of the Progressive Conservative Party and a member of the government. A group of provincial civil servants told us of their concern about technological changes that will have vast repercussions on the labour force in Canada. These changes will specifically affect women in low skill job areas. Hundreds of thousands of typists, secretaries and clerks will be losing their jobs in the years ahead. That situation is being recognized and understood. It is recognized that that State of Affairs is coming. But surely a sane person would expect his or her government to lay out the programs to allow these people to be re-educated. Sane people should expect that from a sane government, but sane people realize we have an insane government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Miss MacDonald: Who put them there?

Mr. de Jong: With the proposed cuts, the ability of our educational system to deal with the technological changes that are coming around the corner has been severely hampered. Why do people opposite go on such a self-destructive course in this country? Do they not like Canada any more? Why is this government going around with an axe destroying the institutions that have given this country strength? What insanity has possessed this government?

Mr. Blaikie: Its members are tired, bitter, weary and cynical.

Mr. de Jong: If we as a country are to maintain our economic and cultural position, if we are to remain united as a country, if we are to flourish in terms of understanding each other and each other's culture, then we need strong educational institutions. Our educational institutions are one of the major sources of strength for Canada. Why does this government create an aura of insecurity for them? In order for our educational strength to be nurtured and developed, the institutions need security. Institution administrators need to know that financing will be there next year and the year after and the year after that. Our young people who are taking doctoral degrees in the sciences or the humanities want to know that funds will be available down the road. But instead these people are faced with insecurity, not knowing how deep and how broad the cuts will be. This is not responsible government. It is irresponsible, crazy government.

The university and student associations have made various recommendations. In a brief to the Prime Minister from the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada dated January, 1981, the following was requested:

(1) The federal government recognize that its cash transfers under EPF provide an essential underpinning of university financing in Canada and that it is important, therefore, that any changes in EPF that may be developed with the provinces ensure the continued financial viability and effectiveness of Canadian universities in meeting both provincial and Canada-wide needs;—

● (1630)

Secondly, they called upon the federal government to:

—respect the commitment, made by Prime Minister Trudeau in 1976 when he announced the EPF program, not to amend the EPF arrangements without giving three years' notice of any such intention.

They called for a broad-based royal commission or public inquiry to address itself to the whole question of the function of universities, how much financing they will need and how it is to be arranged. They are asking for a reasonable response, for a process of consultation and co-operation so that education, which is not just a federal or provincial responsibility, can be carried out in a co-operative manner. That is what the universities are calling for, exactly the same as the students.

The National Union of Students, Mr. Speaker, also called for a royal commission or public inquiry into the educational system. Let it be open, let there be input from the public, from students and faculty, from the administration, and from the provinces as well as the federal government. Do not do it in a secretive and unilateral manner, the way the government is now proceeding.

There is a lot of fear in the educational system, Mr. Speaker, about what type of universities and what type of education the great masterminds across the way have in mind. Are they going to withdraw support now through the provinces and replace it in the future with direct grants—perhaps, for example, a voucher system, something which the students are totally dead set against. I share their paranoia about the intentions of this government because it certainly has not been open. We do not know what its intentions are. I suspect, Mr. Speaker, it has some grand design in mind. I suspect it wants to model its own type of university. I have a feeling it might think the system has not worked quite the way it should have and it is going to do it better.

An hon. Member: It has not worked to its advantage.

Mr. de Jong: Well, that is exactly it. It has not worked to its advantage; it has not worked to the Canadian people's advantage either. Yes, there is some more fine tuning which should occur. Yes, universities are badly in need of funds, but the basic structure is there. Universities in this country have evolved and developed over decades, and for the government to think that it can do it better reflects the same wisdom and knowledge which went into its mad design to build the super airport in Mirabel. I suggest it is the same type of planning and thinking and it will be a ghastly and costly mistake which future generations will have to bear.

Is it really the intention of the government to fine tune the education system, so to speak, so that it will produce just technical robots because the government feels this is what the