

Office of Education

as much per capita—per child—there is not equal opportunity in the educational field. Possibly this is one area, if the information was properly put together, where the provinces might agree that the federal government could intervene to ensure equal opportunity. The first thing to do is put the information together.

I hope with these few remarks I have pointed out why, in my opinion, the motion as such is certainly not intended to be an intervention in the provincial area of authority, and why at relatively small expense the approval of this motion could result in the dissemination of a lot of valuable information and ultimately mean better education for many children in those provinces where the educational system is below the average for Canada as a whole.

Mr. Howard Johnston (Okanagan-Kootenay): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member who has presented this motion. He is known in this chamber for his independence of thought and for always being ready to introduce ideas that are new or that go against the stream of things as it has been in this country.

It is not my purpose this afternoon in rising to speak on the motion to oppose it in the normal sense of opposition, nor to enter very greatly into the jurisdictional question. I know that the virginity of the provinces in respect of controlling education was long ago seduced by offers of money in various fields, be they second language training or the development of facilities for education in areas like auto mechanics. That was one of the moves made some 20 or so years ago with a fair provision of federal funding. While all of these interventions, and there are others, are extra jurisdictional, they are so welcome that one finds increasingly almost every offer of money being accepted. Whether the money actually gets used for the purpose for which it is offered is one of the problems.

I realize too that the hon. member was not really speaking of large sums of money to be disseminated. That is not the role of the office, I gather, as he presents it. Whether the federal office of education could function today in Canada's somewhat shattered system of education, I do not know. At one time in British Columbia we had a system of education which was unique in that it was the most secular of all educational systems in the country. This was due to the fact that the people setting up the original system of education in the united colony decided prior to British Columbia's entry into confederation that they would establish a secular system of education.

● (1622)

Because that system was in place when British Columbia joined confederation and in the British North America Act, it had to remain, and remain it did until very recently. I suppose it still remains that way, although the provincial government is prepared to recognize independent schools and to provide public funding to them, I gather, in the next three years or so, under certain circumstances. So even in British Columbia there will be a breaching of the system and the setting up of additional systems, because I notice in the province a rush to establish independent schools. I am sure that some of these

schools are being established, even though it is expensive to establish a school today, in the hope of assistance through public funds in the future. Of course, the hon. member was correct when he said there will be systems within systems.

The other thing which makes it increasingly difficult for the federal office to function is that even within the public system there are great differences. The "in" thing in education in the last years has been to individualize the instruction student by student, to introduce novel courses school by school and to have the school responsible for its curriculum in a way is not really the equivalent of the system in the United Kingdom, because we do not have anything comparable to Her Majesty's inspectors. In fact, that might be something to consider, that the federal office have a corps of educational inspectors to fan out across the country and to report, with no jurisdictional powers at all but armed simply with powers of persuasion and example.

I am a little concerned about the motion's emphasis on second language training because that is one of the areas where a good deal of money has been spent and, where even the Auditor General has expressed concern at the inability to obtain any clear indication whether that money was spent for its intended purpose. In realizing the problems that have arisen through the whole bilingual and bicultural program in this country and the way it has been administered, one would hardly recommend additional spending unless there was at the same time some great rethinking as to what have been the results of that effort and money.

I am sorry that the member for York South (Mrs. Appoloni) has left, because after listening to her emotional and interesting speech a half hour ago and her defence of the lump sum payment of family allowances, one can foresee in the future where the result of a national education office would quite likely be payment of lump sums to every student of voting age quite close to the election date. One grows cynical at the way federal interventions are used and the way changes are brought about, apparently for the highest of motives. For we who are in the profession of politics, it is difficult not to grow a little cynical and impossible for us to totally disregard the timing of some of these federal initiatives.

A federal office of education will not improve the situation across the country. I agree with the hon. member's comment that there are great discrepancies in the quality of education. But I would argue that these have virtually nothing to do with money being available to the provinces, but have everything to do with the loss of nerve in the teaching profession. There has also been a loss of nerve by parents who have entrusted their children to the school system, and a willingness on their part to put up enormous sums of money for what are not necessarily the most beneficial aspects of an educational system.

It is a truth of modern education that every advance in the last 50 years has placed something between the teacher and the student, be it film strips, movies, television, overhead projectors, a semester system or a mini-course system. They are all devised to shorten the time that the teacher must spend with his or her students, in spite of the fact they have been