

*Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements*

(Mr. Trudeau) last June, he had occasion to remark that there was a necessity for some continuing forum for the discussion of provincial and federal concerns in this matter. In the statement the Prime Minister made on the subject which was tabled in this House in the middle of last June, paragraph 22 dealt with the necessity of combining and co-ordinating federal and provincial efforts. He said:

Combining and co-ordinating federal and provincial efforts require appropriate arrangements for intergovernmental consultation at the ministerial level, so that governments may together consider and develop policies of national significance in the fields of health and post-secondary education.

He went on to say: "In the health field we already have an established forum at ministerial level and that for post-secondary education there have been occasional contacts but we need a more permanent forum." Shortly after I became Secretary of State in September last year, I was charged with responsibility for undertaking discussion with the provinces to see how we could give concrete form to the expressions of the Prime Minister which I just cited. Toward the end of September I met, in Halifax, the council of ministers of education to discuss how we could elaborate on procedures of consultation which would be satisfactory to both levels of government. I think it is fair to say that I found some apprehension on the part of provincial ministers of education about the intentions of the federal government.

**Mr. Paproski:** Did they let you know?

**Mr. Roberts:** They not only let me in but they welcomed me and provided me with a very good lobster dinner.

**Miss MacDonald:** You really did not need it.

**Mr. Roberts:** That last comment is so unkind that it is unworthy even of the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald). She really hits below the belt. Not only that, but she has managed to derail my train of thought.

● (1530)

I was in the process of saying to you and to members of the House, Mr. Speaker, that I found some apprehension on the part of ministers of education as to exactly what was meant by the word "forum" or what was in the federal government's mind when it spoke about the establishment of a mechanism to discuss common areas of interest relating to education. To a great degree I think that those were problems of semantics, not problems of substance. I found, also, that there was concern that the federal government might have in mind the creation of an institution which would supplant, overcome or replace the council of ministers of education which had been established by the provinces and which had done such good work. I am not attributing this to any particular minister of education, but I almost sensed there were some who feared that the federal government might be desirous of making the Department of Secretary of State into a super-department of education and culture. I believe I was able to allay the fears of the ministers of education in this regard. Certainly, it is not true that it is our intention to impinge upon their area of jurisdiction in relation to education which clearly, under the BNA

[Mr. Roberts.]

Act, is a matter of jurisdiction for the provinces. We respect the jurisdiction which they have, and have no desire to interfere with it.

It was exactly because of this concern that we had to establish some continuing procedure for discussion with the provinces which reflected the kinds of views that were expressed yesterday by the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands. I would like to refer to her comments as recorded at page 3242 of *Hansard* of February 21, 1977. I do so not in any spirit of confrontation or antagonism. I should like to reveal that we have, in effect, implemented the kind of approach which I believe she suggested we should take. In her comments, she remarked that she felt we had missed an opportunity to act in a positive and constructive way; that is, to discuss certain questions relating to education with the provinces. She picked out, in particular, the possibility of an interprovincial agreement to ensure unimpeded mobility between provinces for students seeking post-secondary education.

The hon. member lamented that we had let slip an excellent opportunity to undertake discussions on this problem. Later she indicated that she felt bargaining would be far more productive if the provinces and the federal government brought to the negotiations a realization that their common purpose is to reach acceptable settlements and not to find out who will knuckle under to whom. She went on to say:

It is all too easy to see our problem in terms of conflict between the federal government and the provincial governments. All the attention is focused on the arenas of federal-provincial conflicts—

I would like to tell the hon. member that, far from letting the opportunity slip by, what we have done is to establish a continuing method of discussing such problems—and the one she indicated is one which is of great concern to us, namely, a method of discussing with the provinces that question and many others as well. Since September the provinces have come forward in a most co-operative spirit, agreeing with us that such a method for discussion should be established. It is in that spirit of negotiation and realization of our common purposes, to which the hon. member referred in her remarks, that we have undertaken this effort to establish a method of carrying on the dialogue.

At the end of the Halifax meeting in September to which I referred, the council of ministers of education issued a communique. I should like to cite the last paragraph of it which clearly indicates the kind of understanding we have reached with the provinces. It reads:

The council has also been seriously considering its relations with the federal government. Because the concerns of the CMEC cover all aspects of education, the council sees the need to exchange views with the federal government from time to time, depending on the subject, for the purpose of discussing the interface between education policies as determined by the provinces, and various federal programs. It is agreed that the council is the mechanism for such discussions and it will provide further opportunities for them to take place in the future.

Subsequent to that September meeting I met with the executive committee of the council early in November and there was agreement about various matters which might be placed on the agenda for a subsequent meeting between the