

Private Members' Business

• (1115)

This point of view is short-sighted on several accounts. First, it ignores the social situation of a great number of students. Second, it does not take into account the significant changes in lifestyle of every class of society. Today's students are the product of what is known as the consumer society which, as a social model, constitutes the basis of our western economies. How could we confine our young people to a ghetto and believe that they will take part in mass consumption only when they graduate?

A recent survey conducted in Quebec shows that high school students spend one billion dollars a year. This means that half the students in their last year of high school are working part-time. Nobody will deny the impact of this new reality on school results, but we must accommodate these new needs. We created them from scratch and ubiquitous advertising fuels them.

Transferring greater financial responsibilities to post-secondary students will only increase the tendency of students to go to school and hold a paid job at the same time. Faced with increased tuition fees resulting from the government's so-called social program reform, and the Reform Party's intentions, as described in motion M-291, students will react quite normally by trying to increase the number of hours they spend on the labour market, in order to limit as much as possible the need to borrow money. The consequences will be disastrous: time spent studying will diminish, the failure rate will go up, courses and even whole years will have to be repeated, resulting in increased costs for the governments subsidizing education. Basically, it is a vicious circle.

Transferring heavier financial responsibilities to students in such a manner is short-sighted for another reason. It ignores the fact that with the globalization of the economy, the quality of human resources is the key to competitiveness. It is by taking advantage of knowledge, research and development that Canadian and Quebec businesses will be able to penetrate a trade arena with no borders and maybe no rules.

Any increase in the financial burden of post-secondary students flies in the face of this universal reality. Instead of limiting access to higher education, as the Liberals and the Reformers are planning to do, we should do the exact opposite. That is a major reason for not supporting Motion M-291, a motion which, by its objectives, is anachronistic.

The third objective of the Reform motion also reveals the fallacious nature of their project. It reads as follows: "ensure that post-secondary institutions in Canada receive the funding necessary to maintain the high quality of services they presently provide".

This is not very subtle! This objective acknowledges that students, by bearing a larger part of the cost of their education, will contribute to generate resources for universities and col-

leges. Moving in that direction is refusing to recognize that knowledge and know-how are the keys to any modern economy. In this regard we should stress the vision of the Quebec Premier who announced last week, in his speech from the Throne, that he was freezing university tuition fees and removing the failure tax at college level. This is the direction to follow if we want to be able to compete with our trading partners under NAFTA and the Uruguay Round.

We sense that the government as well as Reformers are doing their best to gradually withdraw from the area of education. We, of the Bloc Québécois, believe that the federal government must withdraw entirely from that area of provincial jurisdiction, an area that it invaded not to serve the interests of the people, but to enslave, to dominate and to impose its national standards on the provinces. By withdrawing from that field, the federal government could transfer tax points to the provinces. They would then be in a better position to deliver to their people education services geared to their needs and realities.

• (1120)

In so doing, the federal government would go beyond speeches and do something concrete to reduce the duplication of services delivered by both levels of government. However, to act in that direction would require great discernment and common sense.

These ingredients do not seem to be on sale in the federalist supermarket. To conclude, I urge all members who still care about the future to vote against motion M-291, a dangerous and anachronistic motion because of the objectives it seeks to achieve.

[English]

Mrs. Daphne Jennings (Mission—Coquitlam, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to lead this debate for my party.

This motion is about Canada's future. It is about the future because it is about education. Education is the key to the future for Canada's young people.

I have spent virtually all my adult life in the teaching profession. Conveying knowledge to our young people was for me a most rewarding vocation. We must ensure the future of our educational system in Canada, and part of that is ensuring that as many students as possible can take part in it.

As literacy critic for my party, I recognize what happens if people do not take advantage of our education system when they are young. If you do not learn to read and write when you are young, you are going to have to learn when you are older through the various literacy programs sponsored by communities across Canada.

Reading and writing are learned either young or old but have to be learned at some point if one wants to become a fully functioning member of society. That is why it is so important