

Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act

basis only and that it exclude the Atlantic provinces. In addition, the federal and provincial Governments should proceed immediately to negotiate a formal agreement for the future financing of health care in Canada.

I will table this document for the edification of Members opposite, particularly for the edification of the Whip of the Conservative Party who I know has an abiding concern for the health and welfare of Atlantic Canadians. He demonstrates his concern by his presence here tonight. The medical association states:

Although the Atlantic provinces spend more of their provincial revenues on health care than do other provinces, there are disparities in the range of services available to their populations . . . "If special provisions are not made for the health care system in the Atlantic provinces we can only expect disparities to widen and the national character of health care in Canada to be seriously endangered."

I ask this House, not in a partisan way, but on behalf of Atlantic Canadians: Where have the members of Cabinet from Atlantic Canada been with regard to the provisions of Bill C-96? Where has the Minister of Supply and Services been? What has he said in this regard? Where have the Minister of National Revenue (Mr. MacKay), the Minister of Justice (Mr. Crosbie) and the Minister of State for Forestry (Mr. Merrithew) been? Where has the Minister of the Environment (Mr. McMillan) been? Where have they all been? They have been silent. That only leads us as Canadians—not as partisan Liberal Canadians but as Canadians—to conclude that they agree with the intent of the purposes of the Bill which, as I said at the outset, is clearly and unequivocally discriminating against the four Atlantic provinces.

As a Canadian, I am appalled that Members opposite have allowed this legislation to go as far as it has gone with no amendment emanating from them. I am appalled that members of the Government have allowed this sort of discrimination and deterioration of services in health care and in the post-secondary education field to continue and to be exacerbated.

In another life the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson), that paragon of equity, that great Minister who wishes to have equity in the system throughout, said something different when he sat as a Member in opposition. Again, for the record I wish to quote the words of the Minister of Finance. This is what he said on March 23, 1982:

The only sign it shows of cutting spending is by shifting the burden of the established programs funding on to the provincial governments. The provinces are now moving into a deficit position, a position which will make it more difficult for them to finance this shift in spending . . . That is not co-operative federalism. That is predatory federalism, and it will not and cannot work in this country.

That is what the Minister of Finance said when he was a member of the Opposition. However, to show the contradiction and the hypocrisy, not only of the individual but of the Government of the day, I viewed firsthand a First Ministers' conference in the Province of Nova Scotia in that great capital city of Halifax.

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At that conference, premier after premier said to the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney): "Mr. Prime Minister, keep your word. Please don't cut EPF for fiscal year 1986-87". The Prime Minister, aided and abetted by the Minister of Finance snubbed those premiers. I know that you, Mr. Speaker, in your capacity as the objective person in the House, would not condone such ill-advised behaviour on the part of the Prime Minister.

What was more devastating to the people of Canada was what happened after the conference was over. The Government tried to portray an image of attempting on bended knee to assist the poor provinces of Canada. The facts indicate otherwise. The Premier of the Province of Newfoundland, assisted by the Premier of British Columbia, said: "A deal is a deal and you have broken your word, Mr. Prime Minister".

Looking at what took place at Halifax and what is taking place today with the Prime Minister travelling throughout the country with his video cameras, his flags and his podiums, we understand where the priorities are. Are the Nova Scotians, Newfoundlanders or the great people of British Columbia and Alberta the priority? No, the priority is the great one, the president of Canada—I mean the Prime Minister of Canada. He can return to his living room to see in living colour the wonderful, magnificent blunders he is making on free trade and regional economic development.

I see, Mr. Speaker, that you are indicating I have two minutes—no, one more minute left. I say to the Prime Minister who has a Colgate smile and can sing like no other Prime Minister that he has his priorities wrong. He should rise in the House of Commons to defend health care and embellish upon the facilities and opportunities for the sick. He ought to rise in his place to say to the young people of Canada that their education may have been good in the past but we have to make it better in the future. However, this Conservative Prime Minister is more concerned with embellishing upon his own egotistical behaviour and attitudes. If the Prime Minister has tenacity and guts, why does he not do the appropriate thing and call a general election now so that the people of Canada may have a choice? I demand a general election.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): Order. I hope the Hon. Member will not mind a question and comment period before the election.

Mr. Benjamin: Mr Speaker, I listened with great interest and fascination to the speech made by my hon. friend from Cape Breton—East Richmond (Mr. Dingwall). I would like to remind him that I lived through a doctors' strike in Saskatchewan and watched a Saskatchewan Liberal administration rule for seven lean, famine-stricken years—

Mr. Riis: Mean years.