

*Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act*

Canadians can no longer depend upon the Government they elect to follow through on the promises made during the election campaign. I point out that the Conservative Party has been guilty time and time again since September, 1984 of taking the position that it really does not matter what the election campaign was fought on or what promises were made. Once having been elected they say: "Damn the consequences. We will do whatever we feel needs to be done. The legislative program does not have to reflect the promises made during the election campaign of 1984".

There is one other reason for this level of cynicism. I voice this on behalf of all of my colleagues on this side of the House. I cannot recall in the years I have been in this House of Commons a major debate on a law that is going to have major implications on the ability of provincial Governments to deliver post-secondary education and a level of health care which we have come to expect, being led off by a Parliamentary Secretary. We have the largest majority Government in the history of Canada. There are some 211 Members of Parliament representing the Conservative Government. We have the largest Cabinet since Confederation with 39 members. Not one cabinet Minister took the time to lead off this debate on behalf of the Government. It is no wonder that the Canadian public feels such a high level of cynicism about the political process.

● (1610)

I would like to remind Members opposite of some of the promises made in the 1984 election campaign.

*[Translation]*

Remember the promises made in Sherbrooke on June 26, 1984. Listen carefully Mr. Speaker, the following commitment: To honour the federal obligation to finance provincial health care within the financial structure of the established programs and provide supplementary funds to the Provinces on an equal basis.

*[English]*

That was one of the major promises made by the Conservative Party in the election campaign of 1984. I will repeat it in English for the benefit of the listening audience. On July 26 it was promised that the Conservatives would respect the federal obligation to finance health care in the provinces through EPF and to provide additional funds to the provinces on a parity basis. They also promised to create or enhance those programs which could be identified as a national need.

I would now like to take Conservative Members of Parliament on a bit of a trip down memory lane. I think it is worthwhile to go over some of the comments made by Conservative Members when they sat on this side of the House prior to 1984 and when we introduced the legislation known as six and five. Several of my colleagues have already quoted the words of those Members delivered at that time. They are worth repeating. The Hon. Member for Mississauga South (Mr. Blenkarn), who is now in the House and who is Chairman of the Finance Committee, said the following:

These particular programs, health care and education, are within the provincial sphere. To wind up saying somehow, somewhere along the line, in order to solve an inflation problem you can go ahead and rip apart an agreement without any justification whatsoever, and then rip apart that agreement a year and a half after you start your alleged six and five program to solve an inflation problem you already declare has been solved, is such balderdash to come from a Minister that the Minister himself should resign for even saying it—

This is a breach of contract, a breach of agreement. It is even more than that: it is a breach of an understanding of where we are going in the country.

I must admit that that is a true statement even today. It is fundamental to what the established programs financing arrangements are all about. The provinces of the country determine five-year plans based on their faith that the federal Government will not break its end of the contract. Provincial Ministers of Finance must have this agreement to forecast properly fund allocation for post-secondary education and the health care system. They must have the fundamental understanding, in agreement with the federal Government, that nothing will change within the timeframe of the contract upon which they have entered into.

How can we square that need by the provincial Governments with the law which is being proposed here today? Much has been made by Conservative back-benchers about the fact that the Government forecast that there would be changes made to the established programs financing arrangements. That is simply not true. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) indicated in his Economic Statement in November of 1984 that there would be a review of the arrangements made under EPF. That came as no surprise since it is understood by everyone in the House that this agreement has to be renegotiated every five years. It came as a surprise to me, and to many of my colleagues in opposition, that the Government accelerated the review of EPF. In its May 1985 Budget, under projected savings in terms of EPF, there was nothing mentioned about fiscal year 1986-87. Thus every provincial Treasurer must have assumed, as my colleagues and I assumed, that there were no planned changes to that federal-provincial agreement for 1986-87. However, we were all deceived.

I would now like to review some of the comments made by members of the Government who sit on the front benches with respect to the six and five program which was introduced by the Liberal Government. The present Minister of Employment and Immigration (Miss MacDonald), the Hon. Member for Kingston and the Islands, said:

I would say that the consequences may not readily be discernible to the federal Government, but to the thousands of young Canadians in post-secondary institutions of this country and to the hundreds of people who staff our community colleges and universities, the consequences are very clear. In fact, they are frightening.

This illustrates the type of cynicism about which I spoke at the beginning of my remarks. It is the type of commentary which fuels the level of cynicism held by the Canadian public toward politicians and the political process.

It has been reported that the Minister of Finance has justified the cuts by saying that the impact of a runaway federal deficit was far greater than the problem of shifting the