

Federal Transfers to Provinces

federal and provincial taxes so he has a right to know. The principle of accountability is involved and he has a right to know what the government has done with his money and whether it has been wasted or used properly. That is what is important.

If we can achieve that, then we can move into an era of better relations between the federal and provincial governments. The same would hold true in the case of health financing and other things.

I like to quote the great American poet, Robert Frost, who once said that good fences make good neighbours. That analogy is apt. We need clear-cut arrangements between the provinces and the federal government about the percentage that each is willing to pay. I am prepared to negotiate those percentages. It is not so important how much each level of government pays; what is important is that we try to give equal opportunity to people in all parts of the country to attend a post-secondary institution and that people know how their tax money is spent.

That is why I believe it is extremely important that we develop a system that will contribute to the sort of federal-provincial relationship in which there is no reason and no temptation for governments to claim credit for efforts of other governments. We must have a mature and harmonious relationship between the federal government and the provinces if this country is to thrive.

The national government now spends directly only 32 per cent of the total tax money spent in the country. If the country is to survive and if the people are to think that the national government is relevant, then it is important that it deal more directly with the delivery of services to its citizens.

Contrary to what the hon. member for Etobicoke Centre said, I think we have gone as far as we dare in decentralizing. There is no federation in the free world in which the provinces have as much power, vis-a-vis the national government, as they have in Canada. I think it is part of our tradition and part of our way that our provinces be proud, be independent and have pretty widespread powers. But you could only go so far in that direction before destroying the integrity of a national government. I do not care whether the national government here is a Liberal one, a Conservative one or a New Democratic one; whatever it is, it will be important that the government have relevance to people in every part of the country and that this chamber, where the elected representatives meet to debate the laws of the country, has first relevance to Canadian citizens.

• (1610)

What we have to do is to be seen to be delivering our programs. We have to be accountable to the public. It is not a question of political credit; it is a question of good constitutional sense to keep that proper balance between the provinces and the federal government.

There are other distortions that I would have dealt with had time allowed. For instance, the allegation that what we are suggesting would interfere with the autonomy of universities is utter nonsense. We have asked provincial representatives if they would sit down with us so we could discuss with them the

general ways in which our universities could be improved in terms of accessibility and mobility so that citizens who do not find the particular course they want to take in their own province can have free access or entry to a university in other parts of the country. This seems fair if the national government is to continue to pay more than half the cost. It is only fair that Canadian citizens should be able to attend university wherever they like.

What we do want to do is quite contrary to what has been suggested by some people. I hope the last thing this national government or any national government would ever want to do would be to bring down the standards of our universities. If we are to be able to provide a standard of living to our young citizens tomorrow who are in the educational system today, and if we are going to give them an opportunity to compete in the world effectively, in a world where change is the only constant factor, where technology is changing at such a rapid rate that people may have to be retrained three or four times in their lives, then I think we have to give them a better education than any other country.

We believe that Canadians want their children to have the best possible education to adjust to changing technology. That is the position we take and that is the position I will pursue in my negotiations to reach a harmonious agreement with the provinces on the future of post-secondary education.

Mr. Jim Manly (Cowichan-Malahat-The Islands): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak on Bill C-97 regarding fiscal arrangements between the federal and provincial governments. As we look at this bill, I think the most eloquent comment on the principles that lie within it were made outside of the House and before the bill was tabled by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), when he said that co-operative federalism is dead. We question that statement. Was it simply the despairing word of a tired man, the kind of utterance that we all make from time to time when things have not gone our way? Was this the kind of statement that we might want to characterize as being unforgivably naive, or was there something deeper and more significant in what the Prime Minister said? This bill and other recent actions by the Liberal government—for instance, the VIA Rail cutbacks and the abolition of the Crow rate—indicate the Prime Minister and his cabinet have changed course and no longer accept the principles of co-operative federalism. They do indeed believe that co-operative federalism is dead.

When we look at the track record of some of the provincial governments, we must agree that their intransigent attitude has not been helpful. Too many of them believe more in their own political survival than they do in the welfare of Canada and of all Canadians. Fed-bashing is an easy and popular thing to do, especially when the Prime Minister adopts such an indifferent manner toward the very real problems of Canadians in all regions of this country. But fed-bashing is not the answer. I would like to suggest to members opposite that province-bashing is not the answer either, nor is budget-slashing.