

from the University of Lethbridge. Recently, a number of us met with students from the University of Toronto, who came here to see Finance Minister Wilson, as well as members of the Senate. They tried to explain to him the tremendous strain that this was going to put on their lives at university.

I have a number of petitions, which I will not read at the moment. However, I will quote one sentence from the personal petition that was signed by students:

Furthermore, a sales tax on text books and periodicals would, for the first time in Canadian history, undermine the importance of education and literacy nationwide. Most of us surviving on limited, inelastic incomes cannot afford the nightmare of the GST.

The students continue to say that it heartens them to see many of the senators fighting for them.

I should like to go back to the Prime Minister; when he was talking to his Conservative supporters, he said:

I want to see Canadian educational standards that match those of our toughest competitors. I want to see reforms that will generate excellence in education from coast to coast. I want to see action, on behalf of all young Canadians, who ask only for equal opportunities.

Clearly, Mr. Mulroney forgot to remind his tax advisors of these lofty objectives when they were devising the GST. He forgot to remind them that equal opportunity for Canadian students was one of his priorities for the future of this country. He went on to say to his Conservative convention:

I assure this great convention that this government will carry its fair share of the burden to ensure that all young Canadians receive a first class education as they confront a world class challenge. At the federal level we are going to focus more and more of our attention and resources on long term investment in people, education, literacy and the upgrading of skills.

What will the GST do to ensure all young Canadians a first-class education? Is the GST the government's way of shouldering a fair share of the burden and of focusing attention and resources on long-term investment in people, education, literacy and the upgrading of skills, as the Prime Minister has said?

I would submit that the GST, coupled with Bill C-69, which is yet to come before this chamber, fly directly in the face of the Prime Minister's professed priorities. Bill C-69 will reduce federal cash support to post-secondary education over five years through a conversion of direct federal financing over to the provinces in the form of tax points. In doing so, Bill C-69 will effectively eliminate the leverage that the federal government once had for working with provinces on national standards of education.

As Robert Fulford commented in the *Financial Times*, in response to the Prime Minister's plea for education standards to match our toughest competitors, national standards are exactly what our strongest competitors have and are exactly what would allow us in Canada to tell whether students across

the country have comparable skills in language, mathematics or physics. Mr. Fulford said:

On the basis of our performance to date, it seems likelier that Mulroney will see our competitors pull farther away from us, indefinitely.

Certainly without some power of negotiation, we will continue to have barriers a mile high to national education standards and credentials. In turn, they will adversely affect true worker mobility and economic flexibility in this country; in other words, barriers to the educational excellence and economic competitiveness which is this government's rhetorical goal. The only exceptions to the tax on the GST in terms of printing and materials will be official texts purchased by an educational institution, which will then receive a rebate of about half the tax. The major individual purchasers of books—students, teachers and professors—will not be spared, nor will libraries, many of whom have virtually given up maintaining up-to-date and relevant collections.

None of the supplementary texts that are so important for full understanding and enriched learning will be exempt, nor will learned papers, journals or periodicals, nor any of the materials essential for a current and timely understanding of issues, events and advances. Not even published research and development findings—the stuff that is so vaunted by the Prime Minister as the key to Canada's economic future—will be exempt from the tax.

At a time when education—not just the learning of specific technical skills, but the ability to think creatively, to problem-solve, to articulate, to instruct, to lead Canadians towards excellence—could not be more critical, the Prime Minister has chosen to slap a tax on the very activities that are fundamental to his strongly stated and laudable objectives.

Honourable senators, I would like to broaden the context further. Last week I had the privilege, as I believe several senators did, of speaking with representatives of the Canadian Federation for the Humanities. As a classification, the humanities, as we all know, encompasses a group of disciplines: language, literature, philosophy, religion, fine art, history—disciplines that have been subject to a great deal of pressure over the last two decades. To a large extent they have been eclipsed by the social sciences.

It seems that an arts degree is just not on any more. One should have a technical degree, or better yet a Master of Business Administration, according to our business pages. Yet as the Humanities Federation pointed out to some of us, the business community itself is continually complaining that business graduates cannot write. They cannot communicate, and by extension increasingly they seem to lack the skills of critical analysis, of creative problem-solving and, overall, of communications.

● (1700)

John Godfrey, the editor of the *Financial Post*, made this point in his newspaper back in June. As a matter of fact, he wrote quite a good article and received an award from the Federation for the Humanities who, in order to encourage