

*Illiteracy*

who are incarcerated in our prisons. However, the Department of Employment and Immigration, which spends hundreds of millions of dollars on employment training, is continuing the same policies as it followed under a Liberal Government. It has downgraded and cut back on the programs funded through the Department of Employment and Immigration. These are programs for basic skill development which really try to help people who are functionally illiterate. Why does the Department follow that policy under the Conservative Government as it did formerly under the Liberal Government?

• (1710)

The reasons are pretty obvious although the Department would not like to admit it. There is no quick result in taking people who are illiterate and helping them become literate. That is only the first step in getting that man or woman a job. After all, the Department wants to show results, show it is successful. What the Department does is concentrate on people who are literate and who, in a relatively short training period, can be directed to a job which is available somewhere out there in the real world.

We have failed. There are a host of programs, some I have mentioned, which are funded by the federal Government. There are some funded by the provincial Governments and operated by departments of education in community colleges or high schools. There are some operated by volunteer agencies, funded either by the federal or provincial Governments. Frontier College, for generations has helped people upgrade their educational skill so they can find work for the first time, or a better type of work. Some of these programs have been successful but there is little co-ordination between the federal and provincial Governments. There is little assessment as to the success of the programs, whether they are operated by a federal government Department or a provincial government Department, by community colleges or high schools, or whether some of them are operating right on the job site.

There are dozens, probably hundreds of programs, but they are not sufficient. They do not begin to deal with the reality of the problem. They do not even begin to whittle down the number of people who are functionally illiterate. We really do not know how successful the programs which are operating have been so that we can learn from those which are successful.

A number of proposals have been made which make a great deal of sense. One proposal was made right here in Ottawa last year by the Ottawa Roman Catholic Separate School Board. It developed a model and proposed that we identify the type of service we would provide to a single immigrant mother, for example. It points out that would be vastly different than what is required to effectively serve high school drop-outs or middle management illiterates. As I travel around my city, and I am sure it is true in virtually every city in Canada, I cannot help but notice the tremendous change which is taking place in the type of people who live in the cities.

There are a large number of people who are non-white. They are from the Caribbean, from Africa, from Asia, from South America and from South Central America. Many of them come from countries in which the educational standards are far lower than they are in Canada, with all our faults. Many more of them who are literate in the language spoken in the country from which they come are not knowledgeable or proficient either in the English or French language. We have to deal with that kind of problem.

Any policy on illiteracy should take into account the diversity of the people who are illiterate. Many studies have been done identifying the need for literacy programs in general which suggested that what we have to do is tailor the programs to meet the needs of specific target groups within a community. It is suggested that these literacy programs can be delivered from the existing base of social services. If the school boards, libraries, community centres, colleges and other organizations were to expand and adapt some of their existing programs, a comprehensive and community based approach could be developed.

What they are saying is that we cannot decide here in Ottawa what is needed. Members of Parliament cannot decide, nor can the Ministers. Senior public servants cannot know what is needed in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Grand Falls, Labrador, or in Vancouver, British Columbia. What is needed is to give the organizations and agencies in these communities the ability to develop the kind of programs which would meet the needs in the communities.

Canadians must be given the opportunity to participate in literacy programs according to their own needs. In other words, we need to have input and dialogue. We need to listen to the people in the local communities. They know what is needed. Services should be delivered in small groups, one on one special interest groups, third language and cultural groups and regular groups. In my own City of Winnipeg, at least one union that I know of, and there are probably more, has arranged with employers to organize and encourage their members, many of whom are recent immigrants, to participate in these programs either at the place of employment or in the union halls. These are the kinds of programs that should be made available. When I say they should be made available, I mean that the federal Government has to do more than just talk about it. It has to do more than just bemoan the sad state of affairs. The federal Government has to be ready to provide the funds which are needed to meet the problem.

While the existing institutions can provide a setting for literacy instruction, alternative locations should be provided. This can be achieved through the establishment of facilities at commercial sites, such as laundromats, soup kitchens, store fronts, nursing homes, churches, apartment buildings, recreation centres, mobile units, and adult learning centres. In other words, if we say to the people who are illiterate that they have to go to the university, which could be miles away from where they live, or to the community college or the high school, it could be a disincentive for people to participate.