

National Education Standards

I like to use the term "training" as well as "education" because it seems to me that we tend to relate the word education to academic subjects whereas training tends to encompass more. When we raise the level of training and education in a country, we automatically raise the standard of living. So, Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to support the motion of the hon. member for South Western Nova (Mr. Comeau). I think he was wise in bringing this motion before the House this afternoon for debate during private members' hour. I am sure this is one of the most worth-while motions we will be debating in this House.

Mr. Mark Rose (Fraser Valley West): Mr. Speaker, I, too, admire the motivation which prompted the hon. member for South Western Nova (Mr. Comeau) to move this particular motion this afternoon. I find myself in somewhat the same position as the minister of education for the province of Manitoba. The member for South Western Nova indicated that perhaps the minister did not understand what he was seeking, I am not quite certain either what the member is seeking.

Mr. Comeau: You didn't listen.

Mr. Rose: In his motion he makes the point that he would like the federal government to convene a national conference on uniform standards in primary and secondary education. In his speech he went on to say that he really did not desire uniform standards at all, but really was favouring the more individualized instruction. I do not know whether this means that he supports what he has said in the motion or whether he has qualified that in the speech we heard this afternoon.

In previous speeches I, too, have pointed out the desirability of some sort of uniform minimum educational norm across Canada. Perhaps this motion is quite modest in its extent because it calls for a conference on the subject. I am going to commit the supreme act of egotism and refer to a press report of my maiden speech in which I made some points on this very subject. At that time, I suggested that we should have a permanent national office of education. I agree with the member for South Western Nova and also the member for Algoma (Mr. Foster) that education is assuming a much larger role in our present society than it did when the constitution was first framed. I also agree that the constitutional picture would be quite different if this matter were before us now. I should take a mild excursion here to point out that, although education in the United States is a state matter there has been a federal office of education there for nearly a century. There is nothing to prevent us from having the same thing in Canada.

I suggest that a national office of education would give leadership in establishing some uniform minimum grade equivalents and subject norms across the country; it could stimulate and co-ordinate education research so that we would not remain dependent upon the importation of foreign educational research, money and skills; it could effectively help administer grants, directly to institutions if necessary, and hasten the day when post-secondary education at public expense would be accepted

[Mr. Foster.]

in the same way as secondary and primary education and, finally, it could handle education matters at the international level. We have had a number of embarrassing moments because education comes under provincial jurisdiction, when provincial representations at certain conferences have been taken as representing all of Canada. An office of education could co-ordinate such things as the Canada Council and other agencies in programs to make our cultural identity and cultural life much more meaningful.

I can go along with the member for South Western Nova from that point of view. Perhaps he has thought about it since presenting his original resolution last March and is beginning to recognize that what he suggested, that is uniform standards across the country, really means a return to the lock-step approach in which every child is taught the same thing in every classroom at the same hour of the day. I think he now realizes that this is contrary to the trends in education outlined in the excellent Ontario Hall-Dennis report, moving away from all kinds of rigidity, inflexibility and superimposed external structure. Instead, educators are concentrating upon a much more humanitarian and individualized curricula and methods in a modern way which is more in tune with the child's unique talent, interest and needs.

• (5:30 p.m.)

I recognize that support of minimum norms across Canada is only a halfway house. I also recognize the problem of mobility of people. Many people with children face a great deal of difficulty in the educational system when they move from one area of Canada to another. The minimum norms might be useful there in a number of ways, but only as a halfway measure to the day when each school system will have an individualized type of instruction for each child.

One of the reasons we talk about standards of norms is that each school system is hung-up with screening devices. In order to achieve academic respectability, each child has to be successful in jumping certain prescribed academic hurdles. The only way to academic sense is through the five holy roads, which include English, social studies, mathematics and a foreign language. It is about time our universities and schools got away from that type of thinking. There are many more meaningful things for young people, and certain intellectual interests, than this recipe which is not necessarily nourishing for all children. Uniform standards in the extreme are very wasteful in terms of manpower; they are grossly inconsistent with the objectives of the modern state.

As I said earlier, I recognize the problems of co-operation. Canada is recognized as a country with vast regional variations. I support the statement made by the hon. member that the people of some regions are permanently disadvantaged because of an impoverished educational system. This is certainly true of many rural areas in all provinces. It is true in terms of parts of the Maritimes, parts of Quebec and mid-Canada.

As the hon. member for Algoma (Mr. Foster) pointed out, there is a strong correlation between educational