

Office of Education

Depending upon how one compiles the figures, at the present time between \$2 billion and \$3 billion goes out of the federal treasury into the field of education.

I should like to refer to some of the remarks made by the hon. member for York East (Mr. Collenette) last year. A couple of his points are well worth repeating. He said:

—100 years ago we did not have to worry too much about the mobility of Canadians. At that time, if you grew up in one province, by and large you spent the rest of your life in that province.

—in 1977, with a very mobile population . . . Canadians are hampered severely because of the disparity of education standards in this country.

It is worth underlining that point. If we want to keep this country together, we should start to recognize some of the problems created by the present system. He went on to say the following:

We need a national perspective on education—

There is no national education policy which can direct the energies and aspirations of Canadians . . . Education systems should still be run by the provincial governments, but the federal government could establish broad national policies—

I am not suggesting that we intervene to establish any policy. I am suggesting that the federal government should set up an office which would be an office of information. It would put together information which is sometimes not even available within the provinces at the present time. For example, on the island of Montreal it is quite difficult to put together the two approaches to education provided by the two school systems, the Catholic and Protestant ones. This difficulty is compounded in that area by the fact that the systems are also divided on the basis of language. Nevertheless, there is a recurring difficulty, aside from the restriction presently imposed by the provincial government, to easily transfer between the systems because of their different approaches to education. This is not necessarily intentional, but there is certainly a lack of information transmitted between those bodies. An independent office in the Montreal area would be an excellent idea.

We can consider a federal office as being independent. It could look at the different standards which exist across the country, and possibly the systems in other countries. The office could collate that wealth of information for the benefit of everyone in each province.

Certainly in the maritime provinces there has been a move toward the establishment of a maritime union study to bring together the maritime provinces so as to provide a higher and improved level of education there.

● (1612)

The subject of jurisdictional responsibility, which was raised last year, I find somewhat amusing. First of all, as I have tried to explain today, there is no intention in this motion to intervene in what was generally accepted as a provincial responsibility. Whether it is or is not is not the point. What I found difficult to understand was this attitude on the part of the hon. member of the official opposition who spoke last year that the motion I was proposing was in fact intervening. I found it the more amusing because the week before last I came

[Mr. Herbert.]

up with a rather simplistic motion for eliminating the huge deficit, and that was to stop all our transfer payments to the provinces—transfer payments in the order of about \$12 billion at the present time, approximately the amount of our deficit. No one disputes that these transfer payments are made in areas that are exclusively areas of provincial responsibility.

I was quite pleased, having made that motion, to read in a newspaper account, which I have not heard denied so assume to be correct, that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Chrétien) during the course of a federal-provincial meeting of finance ministers announced yesterday that the federal government will not be proceeding with an expensive program for the block financing of community social services run by the provinces.

The reason I was pleased was not because I do not like to see federal moneys going to the provinces, but because I feel that any time federal moneys are being spent in an area which is generally acknowledged to be within provincial responsibility it should be for good reason. If we are maintaining minimum standards, if we are trying to ensure that the population can be mobile for such things as hospital and health care, then there is good reason why the federal government should use its fiscal powers to ensure either minimum standards or equality of treatment. But in the case of social services, the provinces have insisted that there be no strings. Furthermore, we were not even using this block funding for social services as a form of equalization payment.

Once again there is good reason for federal intervention in provincial fields through equalization payments to help provinces which are not as wealthy as some of our rich provinces. Under those circumstances we are making, or we were proposing to make, a per capita grant from coast to coast. I cannot see any point to providing funds for provincial governments, many of which are proportionately better off financially than the federal government. In principle, the persons who spend the money should have to raise the money.

What I found somewhat strange was that, having proposed the motion to discontinue transfer payments, by a simplistic motion, but one making a point, the following day the spokesman for Her Majesty's official opposition rose in anger proposing her own motion under Standing Order 43, suggesting that the very act of transferring moneys from the federal treasury to provincial treasuries was the linch-pin of confederation. The lady then went on to defend strongly the practice presently followed of transferring moneys from Ottawa to the provincial governments. On the same day the subject was raised by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark), who also was apparently shocked. I will accept their point of view that we should continue these transfer payments. As I said earlier, I am not opposed to transfer payments as such; I am only suggesting that transfer payments should be for good reason.

In the case of an office to collect information on education, I am not suggesting any direct intervention in the provincial field, but I am suggesting it is an area where the federal government could have an impact on education in this country, if only to point out the differing standards, and if only to point out that because some provinces can spend two or three times