

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, February 7, 1984

The House met at 11 a.m.

● (1105)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL ARRANGEMENTS AND ESTABLISHED PROGRAMS FINANCING ACT, 1977

MEASURE TO AMEND

The House resumed from Thursday, February 2, consideration of the motion of Mr. Lalonde that Bill C-12, an Act to amend the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements and Established Programs Financing Act, 1977, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs.

Mr. Robert Wenman (Fraser Valley West): Mr. Speaker, sometimes in the House of Commons we speak about Bills of great importance. Perhaps even more often, Bills like this finance Bill can slip through without there being a recognition of the major and serious impact they will have on our education systems, not only today but for future generations.

With this Bill we are setting an attitude that education is not as important as it used to be.

Mr. Speaker, education not only is as important as it used to be; in fact, it is considerably more important. We remember that in about 1948, after World War II, the reigning opinion was that we should pump money into education and make a great effort in that direction, believing that it would prove to be the answer to all our problems. Those great hopes and the great expenditures for the tremendous development of education across the country, have perhaps not been fully realized. That may be because we have just directed money and have not provided incentives.

After 1948 we moved into a time of professionalism. We felt that perhaps parents and other institutions did not have the answers but that the professionals educated in our universities had. We elevated the status of professionals in society, in our hopes and expectations, only to find out that they did not have all of the answers either.

We made a minor thrust into vocational education. The federal Government took a bold and profitable initiative by establishing vocational wings on our high schools, our colleges, technical schools and vocational schools. It was the correct thrust and it could stand further impetus today.

Beyond those thrusts, Mr. Speaker, in the last few years we have seen a decline in the evaluation of education. Starting in the 1970s we found that enrolments were declining as people had less confidence in university education as an answer. We had declining enrolments. In fact, as those enrolments declined, we thought perhaps there was a type of peaking in education.

● (1110)

However, in the last few years we have seen a reversal of this. Again our universities are filled. Our young people are demanding to get back into the educational stream as an answer to job security and a meaningful fulfilment of their lives. Education is a tool not just for students but to be used to bring our society forward. But we are falling behind just at a time when we need a completely new look at education as a continuing process, not in terms of self-fulfilment but in terms of a continuing process as it relates to the growth of our nation. Instead of cutting back, holding the line, calling for restraint, we need a general overhaul of our education system in Canada. We need leadership for our education system from the federal Government.

Just as we got that thrust which gave us vocational and technical schools, we now need another thrust relating to technology. The secretaries which we hire in our offices today are becoming irrelevant because of another machine or computer. We need more training not only on how to use computers but to service those computers, to build them. We need innovative technology not just in computers but in the whole way in which we do business. Canada must be made more productive in order that it can compete in international markets.

We are losing out to systems of education in Japan, for example, which combine educators with business people and with companies, and project the needs of education on into the next decade and the decade beyond that. We do not have that kind of educational planning and vision in Canada today. We are losing our productive capacity because our educational system is not providing people who in fact can carry us on, whether it be in research and development or any kind of innovation. That means that Canada will die as a major world power in an industrial sense. That reality is being read in every statistic which is Canadian, and this decline is going to be further increased by government restraint in this field at this time.

The first concern of this House of Commons should be for the impact this will have on the future of our nation. We have heard other Hon. Members speak and we will continue to speak about the impact this restraint is having. Certainly, it is