

Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act

not been put in place would have been, by the end of this decade, something in the order of an additional \$5 billion to the post-secondary institutions in this country. It seems to me that that is a cut. If you would have gotten \$5 billion and you do not get it now, that is a cut, far more serious actually even than the six and fiving of the increases back in 1981-82.

Those very same Conservatives who argued about the importance of our colleges and our universities to the young people of this country and to the future of this country seem to have lost their voices. Since the election of September, 1984, I do not think I have read a single speech from any of those Conservatives, or, indeed, from any Conservative, including the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney), on this subject of the importance and the value of our colleges and universities. There may have been one that escaped my notice, but I cannot recall a single speech about our young people and their education.

I wonder if the Government really has its priorities in order. I wonder if this has been a lapse that they have not addressed these issues, or whether they have just decided that these are not significant and important matters.

On the one hand the Government has been saying that we have to have economic growth, economic development, new secondary manufacturing industries and new knowledge based industries if we are to have a strong economy at home and to be internationally competitive. Indeed, the External Affairs Minister's Green Paper on Canada's international relations has the first words in its title, "international competitiveness". The whole thrust of that part of the Government's economic policy has been to make Canada internationally competitive with nations such as Japan, for example. Certainly that would seem to be, judging from everything the Government has said, a very high priority of this Government. I accept that it is, but if it is, then why in the world has the Government said nothing about helping to provide to the young people of this country the knowledge and the skills that are absolutely essential if its goal of Canada being internationally competitive is to be realized. It is sheer folly to talk about a knowledge-based society and do nothing, or very little, to ensure that that knowledge is developed, expanded for the enrichment of the individuals concerned, of course, but for the enrichment of the whole society and for the salience of Canada on the world scene. I hope during the course of this debate someone on the Government side, because there are some university academics on the Government side, will talk about what has happened under the Liberals to our universities and colleges and what will happen under the Conservatives if legislation such as we are discussing today is passed.

● (1410)

Another aspect which I believe should concern us all, additional to our providing for a real knowledge-based society, is that cuts like this, following on the cuts we had with the six and five program, will increasingly make our university and college system the preserve of the wealthy. That is already

happening as a result of past actions of the Liberals. It really breaks our hearts when we talk to people in our ridings who care about education to see almost the same situation as in the 1940s or 1950s. These people feel there will be no chance of their sons and daughters getting to college or university because of the increasingly prohibitive costs. We cannot cut back on public funding of education without having to raise tuition fees and limit enrolments. We cannot do that without our having to say to our young people: "I am sorry. You are going to have to finance an awful lot more of this yourself". If they are lucky enough to get into college or university, they come out with a debt of perhaps \$30,000. I know families where the thought of taking on a debt of \$30,000 is unthinkable. They cannot see that as a real option for them.

We are already going back and we are going to go back even farther to where we were three decades ago in terms of accessibility to our colleges and universities. We are restricting accessibility with admission increasingly going to the haves and being denied the have-nots, whether on the basis of income or region because, of course, in some regions the situation is worse than in others. Surely we are going to hear something from the Government as to whether or not education, and I am emphasizing post-secondary education, is a human right in this country. This is a country rich in history, resources and talent, native talent. I have always argued that talent is randomly distributed throughout a population. It is not just lodged with those who have means. That Canada, of all countries, would deny the basic human right of an education, is intolerable.

In addition then to my first argument, that if we are going to live in the new information society, which is highly knowledge based, we must prepare our young people for it, my second argument is that even if that were not the case, there is a basic human right to education at all levels in Canada. Therefore, accessibility must remain or become once again a fundamental principle in the funding of our education system.

There is a third point I would like to raise today in this debate. If we continue these cut-backs, which I may say are having a drastic effect on our graduate schools as well as our undergraduate and professional schools, we are going to lose talents we have already developed in the past. It is becoming increasingly difficult for a young person who has achieved a PhD to continue doing his research in a university or, indeed, in any other atmosphere. He is simply not getting those opportunities. He is driving a taxi or doing something else.

Indeed, the numbers of young people in our graduate programs are drying up. If we could just cast our vision ahead, say, five or six years, we will find, as many experts have pointed out, that we will not have the young people ready for university and college teaching and research. We are going to need them and we will not have them. Those who are able to do that today and cannot get jobs because of all the cut-backs are going to lose all the knowledge and talents they have developed. Then there will be no more teachers following them. Certainly by the mid-1990s, Canada, as it did many, many years ago, is going to have to again import all its skills