

Adjournment Debate

which several members from British Columbia have received from the British Columbia school board.

The minister replied to my letter. Part of his letter reads:

Since this matter falls within the jurisdiction of the hon. John Roberts, Secretary of State, I have forwarded the above-mentioned to him.

I wish he had told me in the House that the matter is not within the purview of his department because I could have directed a supplementary question to the Secretary of State (Mr. Roberts). Be that as it may, I wish to point out to the parliamentary secretary some of the salient facts which face the Vancouver School Board as a result of the government's immigration policy. Again, the children are used as pawns. They are the innocent victims of the mismanagement of which the government is guilty.

The children have suffered ever since the former hon. member for Verdun, acting in his capacity as minister of manpower and immigration, introduced the new policy in 1968. The innocent children have been suffering because the support system which ought to have been in place for their benefit and that of their parents in Canada, was not in place. Without adequately investigating all that Canada can do for those new Canadians, or immigrants, the minister introduced a policy which has subjected those people to a lot of misery.

The brief that the Vancouver School Board sent to us points out, and I quote:

Since 1975, the situation has reached the point where, for example, 42 per cent of our grade four children are from English as a second language background and we estimate that at least 40 per cent of our total school population come from homes where English is spoken as a second language.

The Vancouver School Board is concerned that the federal government has ignored the special needs of this large segment of Vancouver's young society. We feel it incumbent on us to point out some of the problems encountered in the educational management of students who have English as a second language. Such students enter our educational system at various ages, from various cultures, particularly Asians in Vancouver, with varying educational standards, with the trauma described as cultural shock, with educational lag, and with a different native language.

It is not that the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Cullen) has not heard about this because the Vancouver school board submitted a brief to him. I again quote from the brief:

The Vancouver School Board has, as stated earlier, made presentations to the Minister of Manpower and Immigration without success. We find the negative responses from the federal government difficult to understand when we consider that:

- a) the Joint Parliamentary Committee has recommended to the government that direct funding be made available to school boards to assist in the education of immigrant youngsters;
- b) the problems regarding ESL students are a direct result of federal government immigration policies;
- c) although we have been told that constitutionally the responsibility for education lies with the provincial government, the federal government provides substantial grants for French language instruction and in the past has entered into agreements with provinces to upgrade vocational-technical facilities in secondary schools throughout the country and to provide funds for post secondary education;
- d) both the former and present B.C. ministers of education have assured us that there would be no problem in accepting federal funds for distribution to school districts for the education of ESL students.

[Mr. Friesen.]

Both ministers of education in the past two administrations said they would welcome this support. I would like an answer from the government. Is it going to implement a policy that works hardship on people and simply forget them? Is it going to neglect them? Is it going to provide the \$2.9 million that is necessary for just the Vancouver School Board let alone the outlying regions of Vancouver, to provide the kind of education that is necessary if these youngsters in school and their parents at home are to become properly adjusted in our way of life and be able to make it on their own once they have been invited here? The people in Vancouver deserve an answer. We await that answer from the government.

Mr. Fernand E. Leblanc (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that major metropolitan school boards in all the principal immigrant reception areas of Canada, including Vancouver, have expressed increasing concern in recent years over their need to cope with effective teaching of immigrant children whose mother tongue is neither French nor English. Several such school boards, including the Greater Toronto, Scarborough and Vancouver school boards, have written to various of my colleagues setting out in detail the difficulties in which they find themselves.

As hon. members are no doubt aware, there have been for more than 20 years agreements between the federal government and the provincial governments under which the two levels of government share equally the cost of providing citizenship training, including language training, for adult immigrants. There are also agreements, with every province except British Columbia, under which the cost of language textbooks for such instruction is borne entirely by the federal government, subject to certain provisions on the rate of yearly increase.

In recent discussions on these agreements, officials of the various provincial governments have expressed their concern that the agreements are not applicable to children of school age, and have cited the various extra costs and expenses and difficulties that school systems encounter when there are very large numbers of immigrant children in the schools whose grasp of one or other of the official languages is not such as to allow them to progress at what is considered to be the usual rate. The concern of these provincial governments has been recognized and they have undertaken to provide further detailed information to the Secretary of State (Mr. Roberts) whose department administers these agreements. Under our constitutional system education is, of course, exclusively within the jurisdiction of the provincial governments.

● (2330)

I am informed that the Secretary of State is considering raising this matter with the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada; and no doubt, the school boards in the major immigrant reception areas—Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver and Winnipeg—will wish to convey their views on this to their respective departments of education.