

Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act

meeting between himself and his provincial counterparts. What type of consultation is that? It is not consultation; it is unilateral action which shows that the Government is following in the footsteps of the old Liberal Government. It is not listening to the provinces or those who are concerned about funding for medicare services and post-secondary education in this country.

In addition to not announcing its agenda when it came to power, the Government did not even tell us in its May Budget that it intended to reduce the level of funding for post-secondary education and medicare on April 1, 1986. In the May 23 Budget and in the papers attached thereto it was indicated that there would be no reduced funding for fiscal year 1986-87. In effect, the Minister was telling us at that time through the papers he tabled that he had no intention of cutting the funding on April 1 of this year. Some four months after tabling his Budget he went to Halifax and said: "Oh, by the way, we are going to cut another \$400 million which should have been coming to you in a few months' time for post-secondary education and medicare".

● (1140)

There are only two conclusions which can be drawn. The first is that in May of 1985 the Government did not know where it was going. It did not know what its plans were with regard to post-secondary education. The second is that the Government deliberately kept the House and the provincial Governments in ignorance of the plans which it was undertaking. Neither road is a very honourable one to travel.

The first one says that the Government did not know what was going on and all of a sudden in September it decided that it needed more money. Why did it need more money in September? Was it because it bailed out the banks? Was it because it found out that it was giving more money to the oil companies than it had thought it was going to give? Was it because it thought that the group of people who should suffer should be those who need our medical services and those who want to take advantage of our post-secondary education facilities? Is that what happened? If not, then the second alternative is there for us to see. The Government knew in May what it was doing, but it did not want the provinces or the groups concerned with medicare and post-secondary education to have an opportunity to oppose what it was doing.

Following in that vein one would assume that by saying it will be making cuts sometime in the distant future, sometime around 1990-91, people would not be concerned. However, that is not good enough. If the Government knew what it was doing it should have told the people of Canada. It should have consulted with the provinces to ensure that they knew what the Conservative agenda was.

As a result of either course of action the Government stands condemned. First, it stands condemned for not consulting or, alternatively, for not knowing what it was going to do. When it decided it had to save some more money to protect its image of deficit-fighting, it decided to pick on the people who are most

in need of our services. Again, it picks on those people who receive medical services and those who need to have a better education system in order to compete in our more complicated society.

In introducing the legislation the Parliamentary Secretary said, as reported at page 12,667 of *Hansard*:

Let us look at consultation with the provinces to assure the House that the maximum possible consultation has taken place with those who are most directly affected by EPF.

What consultation? Did the Government meet with the provinces? No. Did it listen to the provinces when they finally forced this issue on to the agenda at the First Ministers' Conference in Halifax at the end of November? No. Did the federal Government meet with university professors? Did it meet and discuss this matter with healthcare professionals? Does the Government have the support of any of these groups in our society? No.

What consultation? What is any different in the way the Conservative Government has approached cut-backs in regard to medicare and post-secondary education than the approach taken by the Liberals in 1981-82? The answer, of course, is that there is no difference.

Let us look at some of the words spoken by Conservatives in 1981-82 when they, as members of the Opposition, attacked the Liberals for reducing funding for medicare and post-secondary education. The present Minister of National Health and Welfare, who at that time was opposition health critic, said as reported at page 15,751 of *Hansard*: "Today we have unilateral action." The Hon. Member was condemning the fact that the federal Government was going ahead with these cuts. It was doing so despite the fact that the provinces opposed them and despite the fact that the majority of the provinces at that time, as is the case today, said that they needed more money for medicare and post-secondary education. The provinces were saying that what they should be doing was sitting down with the federal Government to negotiate levels of funding in terms of the types of programs which should be financed. In this way both the provinces and the federal Government would know what would happen over the next five years. They could agree as to what programs should be continued and from where the money would come. So the present Minister of National Health and Welfare condemned the federal Liberal Government for taking unilateral action. As reported at the same page of *Hansard* he went on to say:

I suggest that equalization, post-secondary funding, medicare and hospitalization are too important to be brought into the arena of confrontation—

In other words, the Hon. Member was saying that these matters should be negotiated. Further on in his speech he went on to talk about the lack of adequate notice which the Liberal Government had given to the provinces at that time. Exactly what did the Hon. Member for Provencher (Mr. Epp) say? He said this:

People have plans and programs regarding past commitments and they believe there must be some continuity in the programs.