

Oral Questions

begin in earnest, the federal government will be putting forward its position to the ministers of finance but that stage has not yet been reached. Undoubtedly, we will want to hear from the parliamentary task force before we put our position before the provinces.

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, what we have had here today is an indication that the government is carrying on exactly as it was before the task force was established. The task force is simply a smoke screen to try to take the heat off the government, to try to keep away from parliamentary debate the fact that the Government of Canada is now actively considering cutting back \$1.6 billion of aid to community colleges, vocational schools and universities across the country, and is transferring the burden away from the federal government toward students and their parents across the country. The Minister of Finance is just now finding out what is going on.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1420)

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OBLIGATIONS

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Let me ask a specific question regarding the obligations of the Government of Canada. Does the Government of Canada believe that it has an obligation, legal or moral, to Canadian universities, community colleges or vocational schools to give three years' advance notice before terminating any assistance for education under the Established Programs Financing arrangements?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, the first thing I want to say is that the Leader of the Opposition really does not know what is going on in this House of Commons when he says that the task force has been set up as a smokescreen by the government. The task force was asked for by the hon. member for Broadview-Greenwood—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. MacEachen:—and by the hon. member for Mississauga South when he moved a motion under Standing Order 43, as I recall, asking that a parliamentary task force be established. We are doing it at the request of members of the opposition, and are glad to do it. The Leader of the Opposition is as mistaken on that point as he is on all the other points, particularly when he says that we have reached a decision to cut off funds to students in Canadian universities. How desperate is the Leader of the Opposition when he puts forward that misrepresentation!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, the only cause for desperation in this House is the desperation of ever getting an answer from this minister who cannot find it within himself to give a straight answer.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: We asked whether he was telling the truth or whether the Minister of National Health and Welfare was telling the truth. He has not answered. We asked him whether he believes there is a moral or legal obligation on the Government of Canada to give advance notice to the colleges and students whom he intends to cut off. He does not answer. Will he answer one of those two questions?

Miss MacDonald: Answer them both.

Mr. MacEachen: Madam Speaker, the questions are impossible to answer because each of the questions is based upon a blatant misrepresentation of the facts.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

POSSIBLE EFFECTS IF REDUCTIONS MADE IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION FUNDS

Mr. Tom McMillan (Hillsborough): Madam Speaker, my question is also directed to the Minister of Finance. Will the minister tell the House if the federal government terminated the \$1.5 billion that it pays to universities, community colleges and vocational schools across Canada for their operating costs, if the federal government did terminate that amount of funds—and there is a certain amount of credibility given to the assertion that the government is giving active consideration to that because of the statement made by the Minister of National Health and Welfare—does the Minister of Finance realize that would result in annual cuts of \$100 million to the University of Toronto, \$40 million to the University of Manitoba—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. member should ask his question and not give statistics.

Mr. McMillan: In light of that and the fact that the minister has not denied that the government is seriously considering or contemplating massive cuts in federal government support for operating costs of post-secondary educational institutions, will the minister tell the House, even if the government has not made its decision and even if it is just negotiating, whether it is at least contemplating cuts of that magnitude? If so, will he advise how the quality of education and research in Canada can be maintained in the face of such massive cuts?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, the hon. member is basing his question on a hypothetical situation; if something happened, if this happens, if that happens, if the other situation happens. He is asking me to address hypothetical future developments. All that I said in the budget, and it has not been concealed, is that for the two fiscal years ending in 1983-84, in the negotiations with the provinces, some of which have very healthy surpluses I may add in passing, we hope to achieve savings in these intergovernmental transfers.