

Government Orders

That is part of the fundamental concept of Canadian federation as we have known it for the last number of years. Any attack on that is an attack on the Canadian federation.

One of the reasons we are facing a crisis in this country concerning the Constitution and whether provinces feel there is reason to remain within Confederation is because of the unilateral and high-handed cuts the government has made to transfer payments.

• (1250)

People in the country are starting to say: "What is the purpose of belonging to a federation like Canada when you have a government that can unilaterally, without consultation, change the whole basis of the system", particularly as it relates to the programs that are being attacked. These are the social programs that Canadians value so highly.

This attack started really in the late 1970s, accelerated under the Liberals in the early 1980s and has become a style of government under this Tory government. One begins to wonder whether in addition to being an attack on social programs, it is not in fact a philosophical attack on the whole question of universality and availability of social supports because this government does not philosophically agree with it.

The only difference between the Tories and the Reform Party is that the Reform is a little more honest. The Reform Party, without any question, stands up and says: "We no longer believe in universality. We do not want universal old age pensions. We will no longer support universal, accessible health care for all people. We do not want family support programs. We do not want availability of day care on a universal or even on a needs basis." The Reform Party is at least honest, they stand up and say it.

This government is saying it very strongly by its actions.

I want to briefly run through some of the programs that have been attacked by the attack on transfer programs. Let us start with the EPF, Established Programs Financing. The cuts are going to be, by the turn of the century, about \$90-some billion, \$64 billion for health care, the balance for post-secondary education.

This money was expected by the provinces. Let us remember how it was allocated. It had nothing to do with expenditures, which I hear them talking about, which is the Canada Assistance Plan. The fact that the provinces increased their expenditures had nothing to do with the obligation of the federal government to increase its transfer payments.

The transfer payments were to be increased solely on the economic ability of this country to pay, the economic ability of the country to pay being measured by the Gross National Product. The EPF was established on that basis, that there was no increase except when the federal government was in a financial position with the growth of economy to increase transfer payments.

Of course the Liberals got the federal government into debt and it has been accelerated by the Tories. Neither of those parties have come to grips with the question of the national debt and how to service that national debt. The government is using that now to say that it can no longer afford its obligations.

Members of the government repeatedly get up and say that the economic future of this country depends on an educated work force, on leading the world in research and development, on leading the world in the number of scientists, professionals, engineers, innovators, that we must increase our training, we must increase our competence if we are to be competitive. I would agree with them. However, why would they then turn around and cut the very money that provide this to the provinces for post-secondary education? I begin to wonder whether they really believe this or are they playing fast and loose with the Canadian electorate by verbally saying one thing, but in reality doing something else.

It is the same with health care. They say they really believe in a national health care program with national standards that are enforceable by the federal government. But they have basically gutted the Canada Health Act because the transfer payments have been cut so low that within the next two to three years there will be no more money transferred to most of the provinces.

With the loss of cash there is no way that the government is going to be able to enforce the Canada Health Act. I can very well see a federal government saying to the province of Quebec: "We're not going to allow you to introduce user fees. We are not going to allow you to restructure your health care system the way you want to because we philosophically disagree with it.