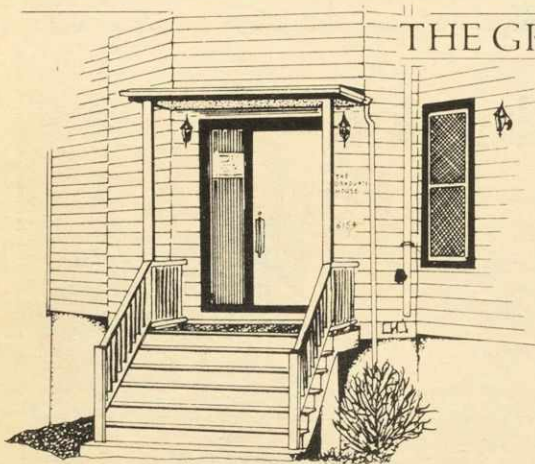


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Secretary not informed

by Peter Kuitenbouwer
of Canadian University Press

HULL, Que. (CUP) — Finance Minister Michael Wilson apparently did not consult Secretary of State Benoit Bouchard before telling provincial finance ministers that transfer payments for health care, colleges and universities would be cut by \$6 billion.

Wilson announced the cuts, which will be spread over five years between 1986 and 1991, at a private finance ministers meeting in Halifax Sept. 26-27.

"I just saw Mr. Wilson the day before this meeting but I don't remember (if he told me about the cuts)," Bouchard says. "If I remember I didn't discuss this question, but I'm not sure..."

A pamphlet provided by Bouchard's office lists at the top of his department's responsibilities "helping Canadians continue their education beyond the secondary, or high school level through financial assistance to

provincial and territorial governments.

Bouchard also confirmed the \$6 billion total of the cuts, during an interview with Canadian University Press at his Hull office on Nov. 7. He is the first federal cabinet minister to acknowledge that figure, which opposition MPs have been using in questions to the Conservative government in recent weeks.

Using a 1977 formula, the federal government will transfer \$12 billion to the provinces this year for health care and post-secondary education. This is about 12 per cent of the federal budget. The federal government says about \$4.5 billion of this should be spent on colleges and universities.

Currently, transfers increase 7.5 per cent a year, based on inflation and gross national product.

"Mr. Wilson is going to negotiate with the provinces right now to decrease the level of transfer from seven to five for the next five years. It's not easy to have good figures but I believe it's about \$6 billion less," Bouchard says.

In the interview, Bouchard said the federal government must take some responsibility for what happens to universities, even though education is constitutionally a provincial matter.

"The federal government has to recognize that it has a responsibility for all the students in Canada. They have the same right — to reach university studies," Bouchard says.

Bouchard says that if the provinces don't start transferring more of the federal money to education, his ministry will get tough.

"As long as it's possible to have a good understanding with the provinces I do so, because it's perhaps the best answer," Bouchard says.

"But at the same time if we realize that the provinces do not want to take their responsibilities, we have to raise the question just for the federal level."

Bouchard says transfer payments would be a topic at the Nov. 28 first ministers conference in Halifax and that he was planning to attend.

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