

Federal-Provincial Relations

hon. member from Newfoundland suggested, convene a national conference and deal with the problems of education on a national basis. We must remember that although the government pours money into technical and trade education, the people of this country are mobile. The young people of Saskatchewan may move to Toronto or Hamilton, and when they apply for a job in order to exercise their skills in the trade they have learned they may find themselves competing with 100, 200, 300 or 400 applicants from other parts of Canada who have taken the same kind of training on the assumption that jobs are available.

In this House we have taken part in interesting debates centering on the question of regional disparities. Regardless of anything the Council of Ministers of Education may say, I think it is up to the federal government to say whether we should introduce general standards in education which will meet the needs of our young people on a national scale as they become available for employment.

We must also consider the problem of young people who are trained in this country in a particular profession and who, not finding a job here, move to the United States in order to work in that profession. Only if there is a national program for providing employment in those sectors for which young people are being trained today will we be able to alleviate the problem of the exodus of our young, professional people to the United States. At the same time, of course, we must remember the social problems that arise from the mobility of our people. Relatives of mine in the armed forces have told me that young people moving from Nova Scotia to British Columbia, say, may encounter great difficulties in education. Also, apart from adjusting to the educational system, youngsters must make social and other adjustments.

We must also consider the difficulty, referred to by the parliamentary secretary, of financing education. When the British North America Act was passed in 1867 it was agreed that educational costs would be met by property taxes. It has become difficult to provide equal opportunities in education for all since property taxes are not sufficient for providing all the facilities required. The federal government, therefore, must come to grips with the question and determine whether the concept of financing education through property taxes—I am thinking of rural Saskatchewan in particular—is not outmoded and outdated. Is the property tax a large enough source of educational revenue in each of our provinces and municipalities?

The teaching profession at the post-secondary level in the last few years has developed some really interesting proposals for setting up a national council of educators which would look into the question of national standards. The parliamentary secretary told us of the Council of Ministers of Education. It is now incumbent on the federal government, I believe, to take such action as is suggested by the hon. member from Newfoundland and convene a national conference which will attempt to deal with the problems of education. I ought to deal with uniform standards as well as with the financing of education.

I conclude my remarks on this motion by expressing the hope that it will be voted on and will receive the unanimous support of the House. I compliment the hon.

[Mr. Knight.]

member for bringing forward the motion and I commend its intent.

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, the private member's notice of motion No. 10, in the name of the hon. member for Gander-Twillingate (Mr. Lundrigan), reads:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government of Canada should consider the advisability of taking the initiative in securing the collaboration of the provinces in the convening of a national conference on uniform standards in primary and secondary education.

• (1730)

First, I want to congratulate the hon. member for bringing this question before the House. It is a matter of concern to many Canadians. A year or so ago, when I travelled with the constitutional committee to various parts of this country, it was a common complaint that when people move from one part of the country to another their children have to move back a grade or forward a grade in school. Often the subjects are not aligned so that this can be done in an easy way. Therefore, I am glad the hon. member has put this motion before the House today.

I am also glad that the hon. member is not talking about a uniform curriculum but about uniform standards. I suppose standards are the end result of work in a specific curriculum. That may pose some difficulty, but I am pleased that he does not want a uniform curriculum, which of course would be very difficult to achieve. I do not think anyone in this country would like to see one flat, monolithic curriculum across the country in which students from Bonavista to Vancouver Island would learn exactly the same thing on the same day.

The problem of curriculum is even greater than one might think. It was only four or five years ago that in the province of Ontario we had a greater level of uniformity across the province. There were provincial school inspectors who made sure that we had a standard across the province. Since then the province has been carved into 30 to 40 school divisions. These divisions have considerably more autonomy than the old, local township school area boards. We have a multiplicity of curricula and programs in our school system within the province of Ontario, let alone a diversity throughout the country. If there were uniform standards they would be of great advantage to the hundreds of thousands of people who move every year from one part of the country to another. A recent figure that I read suggested that one in four families moves every year. I do not know whether they move interprovincially or not.

The hon. member referred to the problem of regional disparity. He suggested that regional disparity somehow relates to education. I believe there is a link. If you look around the world you will find that a reasonably high level of education and training—I use that term advisedly because surely training for a specific job is almost as important as broad, general academic education—well distributed throughout the population is probably the greatest factor in determining the relative affluence of any country. In many countries with tremendous capital investment, the average individual is poor. Many countries are very rich in natural resources but the people are relatively poor. In several countries, people with a high