

Adjournment Debate

• (1905)

They were concerned as well about the weak commitment to literacy. I refer to the \$110 million that has been announced so often that people are starting to think, as the government would want them to think, that it is new money. But \$110 million over five years is \$22 million a year for the roughly five million functionally illiterate Canadians. That works out to \$4.50 per student per year.

They were angry at the fact that student aid criteria have not changed since 1984, that they are now paying much more for their education. Their parents are paying more, and so are their guardians. In fact, tuition fees are going out of sight. There is massive student debt. Students are really quite concerned as to whether or not they will be able to continue their studies.

Of course, most recently, there was the addition of the 3 per cent administrative fee, which is a cruel blow because it is added on to those individuals who need funding most. Now, not only does one have to borrow if one is poor, but one also has to pay an additional penalty of 3 per cent.

These students are well aware of the hidden taxes that have been brought forward by the government. A couple of examples would include the goods and services tax which will impact negatively upon the education of students in this country—post-secondary, elementary and secondary. They were angry as well about the cancellation of the postal subsidies for scholarly and academic journals.

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that on November 9 I had asked the minister responsible these questions. What is the government going to do to counter these problems? What is the government going to do to protect our quality of life? What is the government going to do to enhance our competitiveness with the United States, Japan, Europe—our major competitors? What is the government going to do to make this nation become a nation of leaders and not followers?

The cuts that the government has undertaken in transfer payments and the reductions in other sectors of the educational pie will have a negative impact on the small and poorer provinces. Let me just briefly state why this is so. They are, in fact, a grant that is transferred to the provinces. When the province is poor and small, it

has less ability to maintain the infrastructure that it has had in place for health, education and other services.

In fact, I have almost completed a cross-Canada tour on which I have been talking to people in universities, colleges, school systems, and to parents and students. One of the factors that has been identified for me recently as being particularly critical is in Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland. In those provinces the elementary and secondary school programs are starting to suffer because there has been a massive drain on the resources of those small, poorer provinces to try to maintain what they have in place.

When we think of Canada as a country that is committed to the sharing of resources so that every man, woman and child will have access to those basic necessities of life—health, education and other related services—we shudder. We are concerned and many people are frightened.

As well, during this tour I have talked to people who were responsible for minority language education, French outside of Quebec and English in Quebec. They are concerned that the reductions and the cuts will have a negative impact upon them.

I talked to people in the native education sector, our aboriginal people. They are angry at the capping of education, particularly when at this particular point in their evolution there are more and more of their peoples who want to benefit from post-secondary educational opportunities.

I talked to new Canadians who were annoyed. Frankly, some of them were terribly angry that certain programs for the learning of English and French had been removed.

The government will counter by saying that it spent \$240 million on the Centres of Excellence. But you have to look at that in terms of the total massive retreat of the federal government. We are talking about billions of dollars—not millions but billions of dollars—of retreat from post-secondary education in which \$240 million is a lot of money. At the same time if you look at it in juxtaposition to what has been removed it is not a great deal, of course.

• (1910)

With respect to the Centres of Excellence, what is alarming is that not one single study was undertaken in the area of social sciences and the humanities. One would think that in an era such as ours, in a country such