

Government Orders

key everyone needs to open that door, and the illiterate person who does not have that key cannot enter that world.

Second, there are the practical requirements of daily life in our society which include a minimum knowledge of reading and writing. I am sure the Minister of National Revenue, and it is too bad he is not here, would be very upset if we were not capable of completing our income tax returns and then writing him a cheque. You have to be able to read and write to do that. We also have to be able to read our contracts, bills, and so forth. Need I go on?

Finally, and this is a particularly urgent question today, there is the matter of getting a job. Illiteracy has always been a handicap in this respect. It has barred individuals from the better jobs. Today, the consequences are far worse. In today's society, occupational skills, including literacy, are no longer a guarantee for getting a good job. They are an absolute requirement for any job at all.

Two-thirds of the jobs created by the year 2000 will require at least grade twelve. This means that illiteracy wastes part of our human resources. It undermines our economic development and diminishes our competitive position vis-à-vis countries that are more concerned than we are about the training of their labour force.

In accounting terms, providing sufficient funding to fight illiteracy today is a good investment for the government because it means fewer welfare recipients and a broader tax base tomorrow.

To get a maximum return on this investment, how it is used should be determined locally. Aside from the fact that it is pretty useless to have an army of officials in Ottawa make general, high-sounding statements, it also does not make sense and it is counterproductive in the extreme to claim there should be common standards for a literacy policy from coast to coast, for Canada and Quebec.

• (1555)

Who could claim, unless it is for partisan reasons, that it is not in Quebec, with its distinct culture, that such a policy should be implemented if we are looking for efficiency and not electoral visibility for the federal government.

The best way to avoid overlapping is for the federal government to withdraw from that field. To come closer to that ideal situation, Quebec and Ottawa should at least sign that agreement giving Quebec control in that area.

To conclude, I would like to congratulate the hon. Deputy Prime Minister for the pathetic plea for the unemployed she made on Monday. She said that our society was sick with unemployment and that one of the causes of the disease was the lack of training of part of the population. I agree with that, but

what I do not agree with is the method she proposes to find and then apply the treatment capable of curing society of unemployment.

For Quebec, she says, the disease could be beaten if the two doctors, Quebec and Ottawa, would stop quarrelling, would agree on a treatment and would apply it together. Ever since Molière wrote his play, we know what happens when one or more physicians are called to the bedside of a patient: the fees are high and the funeral director is never far behind.

What we propose is that the Ottawa doctor leave promptly, before it is too late, and leave the patient in the hands of his Quebec colleague who, being closer to the patient, is in a better position to treat him efficiently.

[English]

Mr. John Bryden (Hamilton—Wentworth): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed very much the remarks of the hon. member. I want to make one observation.

I believe that education is within provincial jurisdiction in Canada. I would have thought to some degree the problems in education that pertain to illiteracy and difficulties in reading have to do with the quality of instruction at the provincial level whether it be in Quebec, Ontario or any other province.

Therefore I ask the hon. member if he supports national standards in education as a way to confront this problem?

[Translation]

Mr. Mercier: Mr. Speaker, obviously, the question that was just asked is extremely interesting. Would it be appropriate to have common standards? And I presume that the hon. member is wondering whether it would be useful to have the same education standards from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

My answer is no. Of course, there are some common principles but, as I was saying, beyond the virtuous general statements to the effect that education must be aimed at educating and that the language must be good and so on, I do not see the need for Vancouver and Quebec to have the same objectives. I am still saying that it is not necessary for Quebec's education goals to be established in Ottawa.

Mr. Gaston Péloquin (Brome—Missisquoi): Mr. Speaker, as this is my first official speech in this House, I would like, with your permission, to congratulate all members on their election and congratulate you on your appointment to this responsible position.

I would also like to thank the voters of Brome—Missisquoi from the bottom of my heart for placing their trust in me and electing me as their representative. Brome—Missisquoi is a lovely riding in Quebec's Eastern Townships. It has both an urban and a rural mix and tourism, farming and industry are the dominant areas of activity.