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**Nova Scotia: Education’s speech, Fifth session of the Fifty first legislature, 1978**

MON , APR. 3, 1978

HON, GEORGE MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I would now move that the adjourned debate on the Address in Reply to the Speech From Her Majesty be now resoled. Mr. Speaker, as I see the Order Paper today, the adjourned debate was adjourned by myself so I will just remain standing. (Applause)

MR MITCHELL: Well, you do not want to do that, Harry. It is not a good idea. Mr. Speaker, the other thing, I cannot really remember as I stand here whether or not completed in my last attention to this particular subject matter what is loosely described by all members as the pleasantries but. in any event, in the event that] did not deal with it at that time, ] would just like to very much reiterate, sir, the comments that have been made respecting the way in which you handle your office. It certainly lends a great deal of distinction to this House and to all of the members who participate therein.

I would also like at this time to compliment those who moved and seconded the Speech from the Throne. They handled their tasks in a manner which was very becoming. Their status as backbenchers on the ascendancy, one might suggest. So, and I think one of the healthy things about this government and the people in it is that one always has to be careful to look behind oneself because there are so many keen people in the backbench that one never knows what may transpire at any time. The Premier says some in the front benches, too. But, I think that is a very healthy sign and indicates one which portrays a very vigorous and strong government.

Now, Mr. Speaker, during the early stages of the debate on the Speech from the Throne and I know that all members welcome a resumption of this debate, notwithstanding the fact that a number of them have just left, including the Leader of the Opposition. What I did notice during the throes of the debate and also during the fairly extended question periods that have existed during the session up to the present time was that there has been a great deal of attention paid to the problems of unemployment as they exist in Nova Scotia and very rightly so because this is quite clearly the most important problem which we face and which also faces governments right across Canada.

It has been rather interesting to note the positions taken by the Opposition Parties, perhaps one would have expected them. The New Democratic Party still supports the idea, as I understand the Leader of the Opposition and several of the members, of substantial government involvement in the economy in a way in which the Minister of Finance has described as rather disastrous, and I am, of course, referring to the spectre of current

account deficits. .

They do not seem to. Now mind you, I must say that, and perhaps it has been referred to before, but the Conservative Opposition seems to be concerned, as it should be, with conservatism and as it was expressed by its mandal critic some months ago now, he in effect opted for the whole theory of limited or no growth, and in fact I think one of the members here ventured to call him "Mr. Zero," which is a reasonable name to be described.

Well, there are some arguments in favour of that, but I think it is also fair to say that in an economy such we are now experiencing, where inflation is growing at a rate of about eight per cent, zero growth In effect is translated immediately into a substantial cutback and if one applies that to the field of education, with which I am most familiar, no increase at all would mean a layoff this year of upwards of 800 teachers. Certainly, that is not something that we can afford at all at this time, but I think it tends to substantiate the fact, as those of us who are a little older may be familiar with the old slogan, that "Tory times are hard times." I think that if one were to hang on the phrase of Mr. Zero and his philosophies, one would find a recurrence of those times again.

We all accept, of course, the fact that unemployment is a very difficult situation to try and cope with. Unfortunately, a good deal of the problem is caused by forces which fall beyond the control of any federal or provincial government. This is particularly true in Canada, where we depend to a very large extent on the export markets for our goods. The

current world recession has limited the markets to which we can sell and in many cases - I am thinking particularly of minerals - the price has been depressed, in many cases below the cost of production.

When I say also that the question of inflation is also very much imported into Canada, the most obvious example of this is the very high cost and the increase in the cost of oil, but there are others which are no less effective in increasing inflation but are perhaps less obvious and consequently, I would suggest that the inflation figures are rather misleading. Let us just assume quickly, and I will give you one example of what I am thinking of, and

this occurred first in Brazil and secondly in California, and that is that cold, frosty weather destroyed in one case, the coffee crop and in the second case, the lettuce harvest. We import both of these products. They come into Canada, their prices are escalated three or four times. These figures get put into our cost of living and therefore our cost of living goes up substantially. The fact is that we all do not have to continue purchasing these high cost items. There are alternatives and I think that it is erroneous to conclude that the cost of living of all Canadians has increased by the general percentage by which Statistics Canada may suggest.

It is very clearly arguable, particularly when we are considering wages demands in the public sector and also in the private sector, that we not be overcome by the Statistics Canada figures. I would suggest that if we are considering inflation there is a degree of internal inflation, Canadian inflation, if you want to call it that, that perhaps should be compensated for. I would suggest that that is probably somewhere in the range of 50 to 60 per cent of the figures which are prepared for us, due of course, as I mentioned, to the substantial level of imported inflation.

Mr. Speaker, there is not a great deal that Education can do in connection with inflation. I think there are a number of things that education can be involved in that very seriously affect the economic situation in Canada and in Nova Scotia. I would like to, very briefly, touch on several of those matters.

The first item that I want to refer to is the question of the student enrolments. This is a phenomena or a problem that we have been aware of now for the past several years and, in fact, we even commissioned a report by the Atlantic Institute of Education a couple of years ago on this subject. The evidence is now becoming more and more clear that the student population over the next 15 years is going to faIl from the present level of about 200,000 pupils to somewhere in the range of 100,000-160,000 pupils. The enrolment, as a matter of in terest, has already dropped between the years 1974-77 by about 7,000 students. This is going to have, of course, a very unsettling effect on our school system, but when carried through to its final progression it is going to mean that there are many fewer people coming on the job market and in effect the whole question of unemployment may well, within a very few years, solve itself. We may even find ourselves in the position where we are going to require somewhat more manpower than we already have at this time.

This, of course, is very directly related to the matter of teacher education and for the past two years we have advised the Nova Scotia Teachers College that they must cut back on their enrolment and, in fact, during the past two years, there have been reductions of about 15 per cen t in each of th ose years.

Both myself and my predecessors have discussed this matter with the presidents of the Nova Scotia universities and we have received considerable cooperation from them and the enrolment of student teachers has dropped in all universities in Nova Scotia except one. Some of the drops have been in the range of 35 to 40 per cent. So, there has been a general shrinking of the numbers of teachers going through the system which I think is extremely important because in the past number of years we have only been able to provide jobs for about 50 per cent of those who have gone through the school system and, surely, that kind of manpower can be used in another more productive sense.

A second factor involving the relationship between education and unemployment is perhaps a less obvious one but nevertheless is one which we feel is very important and this involves a discussion and a thorough review of the aims and objectives of education. I was

pleased, I must say, to note that there was held in Halifax over the past weekend a

discussion on the whole question of the aims and objectives of education and I have rather a

sneaking suspicion that members opposite may have had something to do with that - given the fact that the Leader of the Opposition endorsed unstintingly the conclusions reached by

that group. I see him looking at me now in a slightly dazed look and he is not sure what group that I am referring to . . . I am not sure - was it the gay alliance or was it

the. . . Well, I am glad to see that he does agree with me.

I am trying to encourage a little attention over there.

Mr. Speaker, it is very interesting to see this kind of a discussion going forward because

this is a matter of a most serious nature. The whole question of the aims and the objectives

of education have been of particular importance to myself as the minister and also to our

senior staff. In fact, in the past year we have taken fairly specific steps to change the

direction in which education in Nova Scotia has been moving.

I think all of us are aware that during the 1960's and early '70's there did arise

throughout North America in general and also Nova Scotia to a lesser extent a feeling that

students must be allowed in effect to do their own thing. Whatever they wished to do,

whichever direction they wished to go, they certainly are not to be thwarted in those efforts or desires. Quite frankly in a nutshell, the concept of changing the direction of education is

to move it away from this kind of approach and back to a much more normal and positively

structured atmosphere. What I have done quite frankly is to redraft the aims of education

and rather than deal with them specifically, because I think most of the comments which I

would be making are ones in which all members could support. For example, we wish to

develop in the students confidence in written and oral communication. There is the whole

question of mathematics, developing a knowledge and understanding of history, developing

the methods and habits of critical thinking and others which in effect might be loosely

described as motherhood, but nevertheless which I think have to be clearly outlined and

defined from time to time to ensure that the teaching profession is made fully aware of the

directions in which we think the system should be moving.

Well, it could be loosely described as basics and fundamen tals. Use

whatever phrase you wish, but there has been and will continue to be, not only a public

clamour for this kind of approach, but I think there are very sound reasons from an

educational standpoint to get back to a little more basic concept in the way that the

students are taught and the kind of things they learn.

Another area that we have been examining is the whole question of continuous

progress. The general philosophy that people are allowed to continue through the system

without any kind of an impediment being placed in their way. What we are really trying to

impress upon the schools and the teachers is that they require from their students the

highest degree of competence and that they progress at their best rate of ability rather than

just moving through the system without effort.

We are also, Mr. Speaker, actively considering the whole question of evaluation of students. Now, unfortunately, this has become rather a naughty word in the last number of

years and in fact people feel that comparisons are totally invidious, but I think that all of us

being men of the world here would recognize that as soon as a student steps out of the educational system he in fact is compared. The first time that he goes to apply for a job, he has to fill out a form, an application, and he is then compared in what he can do or what he has done with a host of other people applying for the same job. If that person has never had to compete in any sense, he will not really be able to perhaps cope with the kind of life that we know faces each student as he enters the adult world. So really we are moving towards a

system, we hope, whereby the students will be asked to provide more in terms of production, more will be demanded of them and they will have to try and achieve the highest level of their own personal achievement.

It might be reasonable for some of you to say, "Well, this sounds great. Those are wonderful objectives but how do you propose to achieve it? The educational system is a large, cumbersome machine, has over 200,000 students, 11,000 teachers. What are you going to do to change the system?" A very good question, do you not think?

Well, I suppose one would have to admit it then. Nevertheless, there are three things which we have done and will continue to do to try and bring the notice of change of intention to the teaching profession, the first of which is that we in the department prepare each year a program of studies. This program of studies has contained and this year does contain a list of the aims and objectives of the educational system and these are provided to all of the schools, there is, I think, one for every two teachers, but these go throughout the entire system and in some detail outline the kinds of objectives that we feel that are appropriate to the school system.

Secondly, we are directing our inspectors and our consultants to meet with the superintendents of all of the school systems, and the teachers, and in this way, in a direct man-to-man basis to promote the kind of objectives that we have settled upon.

The third method is perhaps .a more direct one and what happened there was that I decided that I would write a letter to each of the teachers of the province, outlining in a very brief way some of the changes that we were making in the goals and requirements of education and assuring to them that, quite frankly, not only the people here within the department, but basically all of the people in the Province of Nova Scotia were standing behind them when they would require, or in their teaching activities if they required the highest standards of achievement and deportment of the students in the school system. Certainly, there is no doubt about the question that the teaching profession is, of course, the most vital link in the school system and the kind of example that they give to the students in the classroom is extremely important and to a large extent, especially where there is not a strong home presence, mould the future character and objectives of our students.

I think, as all of us know, we live at a time when there is a fairly casual approach to the use of the English language. One does not have to listen to the radio or the television very long to come across fairly good examples of inadequate grammar and at times like these, when we are trying to pursue the goal of clarity and precise use of language, the teacher has quite a bit against which to compete.

So, to bring this general comment back to the whole level of unemployment is that I am suggesting that if we reorganize and redirect the educational system, one of the

by-products will be to encourage, hopefully, a larger number of entrepreneurs who will move into society, set up businesses, strengthen businesses and consequently, for themselves and others, contribute to the reduction of unemployment and a stronger economy. You might think that is drawing a bit of a long ball but I do not think it does. I think we have to build on strong foundations and I think, as we all recognize, those foundations are in the schools.

As I say, I am really trying to relate some of the problems of unemployment to the value of education and there is one third factor which, I think, very seriously affects the opportunities for new investment in Nova Scotia and that, of course, is the very obvious possibility of an independent Quebec., I think that if we look at the map it is self-evident what may well happen to Nova Scotia.

That is not a problem that is easy of solution and it is perhaps not a problem that any one of us can do a great deal about, but' I believe that we, in Nova Scotia -- in the Government of Nova Scotia - have an opportunity to do nationally, within Canada, that which Canada has very often done on the international scene and that is to act as an arbiter or an advocate generally of solutions to the problem based on good commonsense and reason.

I think that education has a very large part to play in creating this kind of understanding. I think very often we tend to forget, even though we are Canadians, that there are in Quebec something like six million people and there ranges between two and one-half to three million of those who do not speak any English at all. Just for a moment, put yourself in the place of some of these people. They are Canadians, so-called, but when you begin to look at what happens to them when they step outside the Province of Quebec, unless they happen to be going to New Brunswick, if they travel in Canada, which is supposedly their country as well as ours, they might have a great deal of difficulty in finding a room in a motel if they did not speak English. They might have trouble going to a movie, they might have difficulties ordering a meal, -buying gas at a gas station, some of the very simple everyday things that we tend to accept might be difficult, if not impossible, for a good many of these people. So, I think you can appreciate that it is not easy for them to feel at home in the rest of the country and, in fact they are, in the full sense of the word, the linguistic prisoners in their own province.

One of the problems that we also tend to forget, and perhaps have not really sought an explanation of, is why so few of them comparatively - people from the province travel across Canada. If you looked at the one million tourists, or one and one-half million tourists that came into Nova Scotia last year, I would wager that there would be far less than 25 or 30 per cent of them from the Province of Quebec, which is the percentage you might expect, perhaps even a higher percentage. This is, I am sure, true the further west one goes in Canada. We tend to forget what has happened in the past and I will just mention one comment and that is with respect to the Province of Manitoba. When Manitoba joined Confederation in 1870 it was, in effect, a truly bilingual province. French was one of the official languages of that province and eventually, as time progressed, there was a wave of immigration, of course, of non-french speaking people. They had some considerable difficulties within the school system and the ultimate result of all this was that, about the year 1916, a Statute was passed outlawing the French language. Now, I think this, in itself, had a tremendous impact on the people in Quebec, in a sense drove them within themselves and I think contributed very much to the feeling that they perhaps were not entirely wanted in other parts of the country and if nothing else, it made it much more difficult for them to

educate their children in their own language and I think stopped, certainly, any westward expansion of a large segment of the people of this country.

Fortunately, this kind of mood is changing very dramatically in Canada today. All of the ten provinces, through their Premiers, have espoused the philosophy of a much greater importance in expansion of minority language education. The study of French as a second language is being expanded in all provinces and certainly while the problems that exist in Canada today are very much in a sense more spiritual, if you want to use that term, than linguistic, nevertheless, language has a very great part, I think, to play in an inevitable solution of the problem. I think it is very much incumbent upon us, as Nova Scotians, and particularly us as legislators, to ensure that those people who live in Quebec feel welcome in Nova Scotia and other parts of the country. It is very easy to say, "Well, you can just change the Constitution", but I think, as all of us recognize and particularly the lawyers on the

other side of the House, that generally speaking, the law follows the emotion or the fact of people wishing to change it. It is not necessarily a leader.

So, what I am saying is that a change of the Constitution is not going to change very much the situation of the country. What is going to change it, I believe, is a very strong intellectual commitment on the part of Anglo Canadians in favour of a system, an educational system in particular, that will allow all of our children to develop and be aware of, and in fact very proud of the fact that Canada has two founding peoples. They will, in effect, develop a working knowledge of the language, if possible, and a reasonable familiarity with the culture of the people of Quebec.

Nova Scotia is moving very much in this direction. We are working on emersion classes. We are trying to encourage more French to be taught at lower levels in all of the school systems by the various school boards and, as members know. we are creating a French school in the Halifax area.

Q.1ite obviously, unless the Province of Quebec is retained within Canada, there will be a very serious economic impact on this area. One which we, I do not think yet, are in a position to contemplate.

What, in brief, do you think would be the adverse impact you are speaking

of?

Mr. Speaker, it is a very complex problem but I suppose, in a word, I think that an industrialist who is going to invest in a community obviously has to look at the principal markets to which the products will go. If the markets have to be shipped through what happens to be a separate country, obviously, that is less attractive a location than one in the centre of the country might well be. While one might guarantee the free transfer of goods through a portion of real estate for a given period of time, there is no guarantee that that will always be there. There is the argument that duties might be levied, delays in shipments - there are a host of factors there that might cause difficulties. I think, perhaps, to a certain extent also the effect might be as much psychological as real. But that, nevertheless, is a very real factor.

I would not want to suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the interest in the French language

which we are expressing would mean that all Canadians across Canada are going to be forced to speak French. I think that is impractical and certainly is not even of the. . .being

considered at all by any of those people who are members of the Government of the Province of Quebec. In fact, I think they are all . . .

I really could not agree with that. Obviously, the policies that he is

referring to are, undoubtedly, many in number but my feeling is that the general approach

he is taking seems to be a reasonable one and a fair one for all Canadians. . . .Well, that is,

perhaps, an interesting question. I think it is faIr to say that the mess, if you want to call it

that, has been in existence for a long, long time. It may never have been worse but it may

well be that, perhaps, it might never have been better in a sense that. . .good, because it .

may well be that having brought the problem much more into focus that we can then deal

with it more adequately.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the whole purpose of it is to ensure that Nova Scotians, New Brunswickers, or people from the Province of Quebec, or Manitoba, or Ontario who happen be Francophones or have French as their mother tongue, who come to Halifax or the Halifax-Dartmouth area or who are transferred here with a bank or with the government or any other service will be able to have the opportunity to have their children continue their education in that language.

They have a similar kind of program. There are some slight differences, I will grant you that, but nevertheless I think that we are perhaps far behind the Province of Quebec, which province has, in fact, over the years, done far more for its English minority than has been done for the French minorities in most other provinces.

Mr. Speaker, let me make just one or two brief comments on the future of education in Nova Scotia. I have mentioned earlier the whole question of the decreasing enrolment that we are facing, but that has not really had any effect at the present time on the cost of education which, particularly for this past year, will be approximately $400 million. We are undertaking a series of studies to consider how we may usefully refinance, or alter the financing of education and we have had the first preliminary report from this group. I think all of us recognize that the Foundation Program has not been changed for a good many years, and I think it is very much time to consider changing.

Last year, we entered into a method of global budgeting for teachers' salaries, which was found to be reasonably satisfactory from a number of Boards, and this year we are

proposing with one school board to give it a total global budget in that it will provide it with

one lump sum of money and it can use the money in any way it sees fit for all educational services subject, of course, to the provision of the Foundation Program. Well, the logical board, obviously we can only deal with the Board that has a proven record of success, and the one that is going to be used is the Kings County Amalgamated Board. Well, I must say they have done a very good job, in fact, all of the amalgamated boards have done a good job, but Kings County has done quite a good job.. .

Well, all right, that is a reasonable suggestion. We have as you know, tried, struggled, to provide equal education for all of our students right across the province, but that does become rather difficult, particularly when one considers the size or numbers of students that are being serviced by various Boards. For example" .

The Halifax County Board, or the Board that administers, ,I suppose, the number of students in the area that the Leader of the Opposition represents, is the largest in the province. It has a student population of 25,000 - a very good Board. Te Lockeport Town Board has a student enrolment of 113. There are about a dozen Boards that have enrolments of 600 pupils or less, and it is almost impossible for these Boards, even where they can afford it, to provide the kind of services to obtain the specialists that can be provided by the larger Boards, so I think the future does hold some degree of consolidation of a number of the school boards throughout the province. When one looks at the per cost of educating students across the province, one must also be concerned by the fact that there is a considerable spread. In some Boards, students are educated for $800 a year. In other Boards it is $1,500 a year to educate the same student. There are figures that vary in each of the 69 school boards which we now have between those two ranges, so, quite obviously, there are economies to be obtained in some areas, and I believe in other areas there are justifiable increases that must be "inserted into the system to ensure that all of the students are receiving the same quality of education and have the same range of services available to them.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I am getting close to the end of my time, I am sure - lots of time? Oh well, that is splendid. I will start at the first again.

The whole question of the quality of education is one, I think, that we are examining and when I do mention the fact that some of the boards should be consolidated, I would not want in any way any of the members to feel that we were suggesting that we become involved in large, massive schools. I am very much convinced that the modest size school produces a far better level of education than perhaps the massive one and I see his Honour shaking his head in affirmation and that is very definitely my point of view and I am glad to have such eminence. . .

Well, it is difficult to say what a moderate one would be. I would think it depends on whether you are talking elementary, a junior high or a high or a

combination. Some schools of 300 or 400, or 500 would combine, perhaps, elementary and

junior high, or junior high and high school. So, you have to be - I would think if there has

to be enough students to provide a reasonable degree of interaction, let us say a school from

primary to grade 12 might have between 300 and 400 students - that would be a moderate

size school, I would suggest. There has to be a large enough population of pupils to allow

enough activities to take place, such as the athletic activities, the extra curricular things - the chess club, the debating, these kinds of things and sometimes it is difficult to

do that with only one grade 10 class in a school, or one grade 12. So there has to be - this is

one of the reasons, of course, why the schools have been broken up into different levels, so

that there are possibilities for the students to interact with each other.

Oh, Mr. Speaker, I think that when I gave you that figure, I am

looking over a 15 year span and I think that by 1993 or 1994, or 1995 the school

population - that would be its lowest figure we anticipate and quite obviously, I think it is

fair to say that in 15 years if your population was at that level there would probably be

fewer teachers, sure. One would be unrealistic to think otherwise because if not, you would have a teacher-pupil relationship of 1 to 5, or something in that order. But that is looking

over the long term and that is a problem that is going to have to be grappled with not only

by this government but by succeeding governments, whoever they may be.

One or two final points, Mr. Speaker. What we are doing, we are also trying to involve

the general public and the teaching profession in examining a number of changes which we

are making or proposing to the system. For example, we have issued a position paper, or a

discussion paper, on the question of compulsory subjects in the high school and a new formulation of the primary through junior high. We are getting a great deal of feedback and

this is becoming a subject of very interesting discussion right across the province.

We are also expanding and have a pilot project in the schools this year on the whole

subject of Canadian studies. I think it is essential that we ensure that all of the students

going through the high school level have a much greater knowledge of the history, the

geography and the political science of the country, so that they can develop what I hope

will be a greater degree of perhaps patriotism, if you want to use that word, in the country as we know it. I think somehow or other that may have been lost in the shuffle of the

laissez-faire approach and the general freedoms that have been enunciated over the last 10 or

15 years.

So, it seems to me that that is reasonably - well not reasonably, very much worthy of

pursuing because if we do not have pride in ourselves, then we are in rather a sorry state.

Mr. Speaker, there is just one other comment I would like to make in this area, and this is concerning the whole question of what might be loosely described as centres of

excellence. The Ministers of Education are giving serious thought to trying to develop a