

The Address—Mr. Pearson

covered, an opportunity to make more adequate provision for their retirement and for their old age security. That surely is the main purpose of any public plan. I am sure we in this house are all in agreement as to that purpose, even though we may not be in agreement as to how it should best be achieved. Greatly to slow down its achievement would not seem to me to be reasonable, unless it were the only way to avoid a crippling disturbance of existing plans.

I believe there is no such danger in the plan we are putting forward now. On the contrary, there is every reason to believe that in Canada, as in other countries which have introduced public pension plans, the existing schemes can readily take in their stride the moderate adjustments which will be required. This is the kind of thing which will be discussed and debated in the committee which will be set up, and I hope we shall be able to convince those who are now in some doubt on these points.

The pension plan will do much for security. At the other end of the age scale, our proposal for interest free loans to students will do much for opportunity. Nothing is more important to us than that every young Canadian should have access to all the educational opportunities which he or she is able to use to advantage. In this increasingly complex and scientific world, investment in our human resources is the most important of investments for the growth of our material welfare. This investment is important to all of us and its fruits will benefit the whole country. Loans to students, though an innovation, are clearly of federal concern as are such banking measures as farm improvement loans, small business loans, and home improvement loans.

I know it has been suggested that interest free loans to students constitute a federal subsidy to education and are, therefore, an indirect intrusion into an area of provincial jurisdiction. That does not seem to me to be the case. The loans constitute assistance to individuals in the same way as farm improvement loans and the similar measures I have mentioned. However, we certainly take the view that loan assistance to students is a measure which should be developed in close consultation with the universities and with the provinces. We have already indicated our desire for such consultation, and we shall be working out the details of this measure after such consultations have taken place. I am confident that it can be flexibly arranged so as to avoid any suspicion of federal intrusion into education.

Mr. Martineau: Would the right hon. gentleman permit a question? Did he have any

[Mr. Pearson.]

preliminary talks or communication with Mr. Lesage before announcing, in the speech from the throne—

Mr. Pearson: I wish the hon. gentleman would wait until I have finished. But I can tell him at once that there was an indication of our plans received by those in Quebec.

Mr. Martineau: What kind of indication?

Mr. Pearson: I did not interrupt the Leader of the Opposition when he was speaking, though there were many occasions when I would have enjoyed doing so to ask for further information. I hope I shall be given the same privilege—

Mr. Martineau: We on this side wish to give to the Prime Minister all the courtesy he deserves, as we always do, but in view of the fact that Mr. Lesage has been left in the lurch wondering about these questions I should think the Prime Minister would want to take this opportunity to allay the seeming concern on his part.

Mr. Pearson: I submit to the honourable and learned member that I am surely, at this point, the best judge of the occasion.

I am sure that the extension of opportunity for the individual is an objective on which we are all united and which we want to achieve for young Canadians in all parts of the country. I am sure, too, that this can be worked out without any infringement, direct or indirect, or any field of provincial rights, because no such infringement is intended. It is hardly too much to say that a program to ensure that everyone has full access to education opportunities will, in the long run, with the increasing importance of education, be just as valuable a social reform as universal contributory pensions.

This government—and the Leader of the Opposition mentioned this in his speech—would like to see loans supplemented by a broader provision of scholarships and bursaries for qualifying and deserving students; something to which, I agree, this government is committed and which it expects to discharge in its program before this parliament comes to an end. A parliament lasts, normally, for four years, though this one might conceivably run for five years.

The extent of the need in this respect, however, has not been studied in as much detail as it should be before action is taken. The government has therefore invited the Canadian universities foundation to examine the whole question of student aid as a basis for offering its recommendations as to what further measures, in addition to interest free loans, are financially necessary and would