

Student aid or students slayed?

The provinces trip up new student aid package

OTTAWA (CUP)—Susan Arab is one year short of an arts degree in political science at Carleton University, but she's working full time now, hoping to return to school next year.

Arab needs financial assistance and has taken out loans every year for three years. She would probably qualify for an even higher loan this year under changes to the Canada Student Loan Program, but she didn't even try.

"I wouldn't want to get into debt any more than I am," Arab said about the \$5,500 she already owes the government. She knows job prospects after graduation are not promising.

Canada's national student organization claimed partial victory last summer when the federal government added \$60 million to its student assistance program June 6.

The Canadian Federation of Students overwhelmingly endorsed the new program at its May general meeting in Saskatoon, happy its lobbying efforts had borne fruit.

But the changes won't help Arab, and many others in her position. In fact, in some provinces students will actually receive less aid this year.

The new Canada Student Loans Program increases the weekly loan allowance from

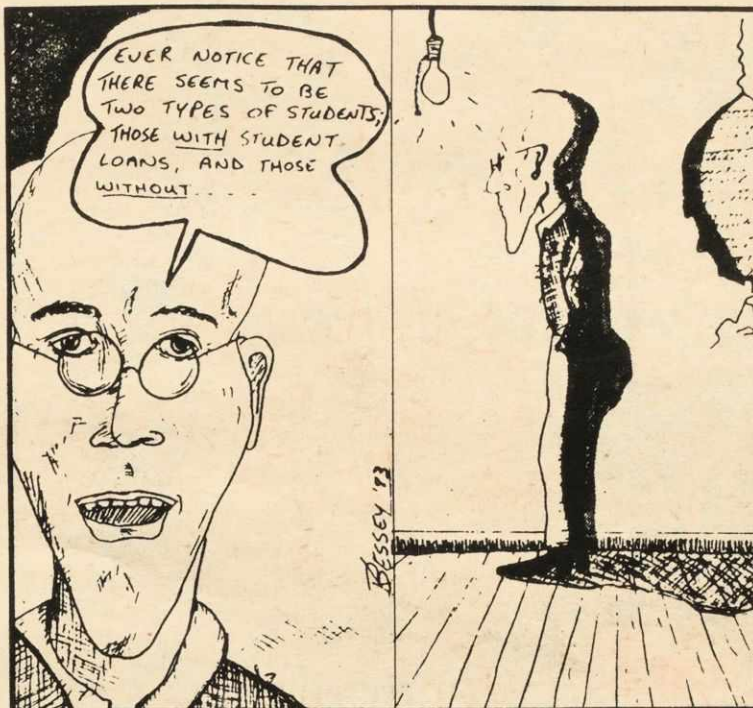
\$56.25 to \$100, for a maximum of \$3,400 a year. The federation says increased loan burdens will do little to encourage students from middle and lower income families to enrol in a post-secondary institution, because they are less willing to carry a large debt load.

"This is still going to discourage many students from attending college or university, especially in the light of the depressing student unemployment situation," says CFS executive director Dianne Flaherty.

While extra loan money may benefit students who qualify for the maximum allowance, those who can't get enough money out of the current system because they are not eligible will still be left out. And the provinces are free to make further restrictions, on top of criteria the federal government imposes.

Secretary of State Serge Joyal made assurances last summer the provincial governments would not cut their aid programs, so the extra federal funds would benefit students directly. But since then provinces have changed their programs in flagrant violation of what Joyal called a "gentleman's agreement."

CFS researcher Eileen Dooley says Joyal has used stronger terms. "He said in March the money is conditional on provinces not cutting back provincial



programs. But when it came down to the gun all he did was write a letter (to the provinces)."

Other provinces have cut their student aid programs, Dooley said, but there's little the federal government can do about it.

"That's an issue (Joyal) is trying to sweep under the rug," she said.

B.C. has succeeded in decreasing its aid budget 40 per cent by

restricting the eligibility criteria, and by making students take out more federal loan money before qualifying for a provincial bursary.

Now the first \$2,300 of aid is loan, up from \$1,200 last year, before a student can apply for a bursary. Students that received a bursary last year, are discovering this year they can only get a loan.

Nova Scotia used the same "front-loading" technique, mak-

ing a student take \$2,400 in loan instead of last year's \$912, before being eligible for a \$1,700 bursary.

"We were afraid they would go to \$3,400 up front," said Atul Sharma, Dalhousie student association vice president external. His pessimism stems from the fact Nova Scotia brought its student aid expense down from \$9.6 million to 6.8 million in 1982/83, through "draconian measures" Sharma said.

To improve accessibility, students need greater access to bursaries, CFS says. Since 1981, the CFS has lobbied for a national bursary program. For a while during 1982 Secretary of State Gerald Regan said the possibility was close.

But "other national priorities" came into play, according to Ed Watson, director of the Student Assistance Directorate. "It's not something the government is actively considering at this moment," he said.

CFS says the new program "wasn't a great thing but it was a good thing" said Dooley. Some students need the extra loans to finish their studies, but it will hurt many, especially students in B.C. and Nova Scotia.

"It's so typical of federal-provincial relations," Dooley said. "Whatever happens, the students are going to lose out."

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