

Canada Student Loans Act

argument can be made today to support the suggestion that someone from a family of modest means should not have the same opportunity of using week ends and after school hours for studying as the student from a family of higher economic standard. We very seldom if ever hear those individuals who say there is something valuable and wonderful about struggling for an education suggesting that every student should earn every dollar required to obtain a higher education.

I have never heard anyone advance the argument that even a student from a family of means should prove that he has earned personally every dollar needed for his university education before being admitted. The fact that this argument is never advanced demonstrates that there is not necessarily any moral advantage in having to struggle for an education.

I support the concept that has been put forward in this house this afternoon of extending this type of legislation to those seeking higher education on a part-time basis or through evening courses. I also support the concept of making loans available to students living in Canada who are taking courses in countries other than Canada. In many cases the types of courses required are not available in Canada or in those Canadian communities in which the students normally live.

This legislation has already been of great benefit to tens of thousands of Canadian students and it is a step forward to the time when university fees, in the sense we think of them today, will be eliminated so that higher education will be available truly on the basis of ability rather than means.

There are all sorts of possible uses for every dollar the federal government has available. There are many requests forthcoming for federal assistance and in almost every case sound arguments can be advanced. The federal government must do everything it can, as must every level of government, to deal fairly with all requests for financial assistance. There is a special urgency to deal with the needs of those seeking higher education today. It is clear that only through the higher productivity which is developed by increasing the level of education and skill in our society can we generate the greater government revenues needed in order to extend our programs of social assistance for the aged and other needy groups in our society who are justly calling for more assistance today and will continue to do so in the future.

[Mr. Gray.]

● (4:50 p.m.)

I think it is also clear that no matter what the formal constitutional requirements may be at the present time with regard to taking into account the status of the provinces in matters of education, the federal government in general can be supported and should be supported in the use of its means and influence in making post-secondary education available to all Canadians on an equal basis no matter where they live in our country and no matter in what part of Canada they wish to study. Mr. Speaker, I support second reading of this bill.

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Caouette (Villeneuve): Mr. Speaker, it is not my intention to unduly drag on the debate on Bill C-197, an act to amend the Canada Student Loans Act, because, as everybody knows, the province of Quebec keeps out of federal plans in education. It insists that section 93 of the British North America Act which provides very clearly that education is a matter of provincial jurisdiction be complied with.

No matter whether it be in a western province, in a maritime province, in Ontario or in Quebec, education comes under the exclusive jurisdiction of provinces and not at all under federal jurisdiction.

A few moments ago, I heard members from the maritimes, for instance, or from western Canada, say how pleased they were that the federal government was intervening, meddling with the field of education, they were pleased. We have no objection if all the other Canadian provinces prefer centralization in the field of education, but we in Quebec do object to federal interference in provincial matters.

It is my sincere belief, Mr. Speaker, that the new Quebec provincial government, elected hardly two weeks ago, will jealously defend its provincial rights, making sure that education will be respected in the province of Quebec and that it will fall under provincial jurisdiction as provided under section 93 of the British North America Act.

Mr. Speaker, this does not mean that the federal government cannot provide assistance. The federal government can help the provinces to solve the education problem. And the only way to help solve this serious and thorny problem would be for the federal government to make available to the provinces the amounts required to provide for the education of young people in those Canadian provinces.