

Canada Student Loans Act

because of family training, are more able psychologically to risk incurring the debt that obtaining a loan requires.

I think the other side of the coin is equally clear. Most students who come from working class families do not appear to be psychologically geared to incurring this debt even if it is advantageously open for them to do so. Many of them reluctantly approach university administrations knowing that, no matter how good the cause, they are going to saddle themselves with debt which may take many years after graduation to discharge. I think it is particularly significant that not many girls, certainly in proportion to their numbers amongst the student population, have undertaken this obligation. If I may use the words of the brief of the Canadian Union of Students, apparently these girls do not wish to undertake obligations which may prove to be a negative dowry. I hope, therefore, it would be the intention of members from all parts of the house some day to arrange the financing of university education, and indeed technical and vocational training, on a basis that would eliminate tuition fees.

I am not suggesting that we should subsidize the small part of the population that may have the talent or initiative to obtain a university education. I hope that in the whole realm of technical and vocational education as well as university education we would move gradually toward the elimination of student fees. I say "gradually" because I think it is particularly important that we do not immediately dislocate the resources already committed to other plans of extreme social importance. I am thinking of medicare, pensions legislation and our commitments to urban renewal. I admit that at this particular moment this is the reason the Minister of Finance (Mr. Sharp) is restricted from moving faster in this field. He has to consider the important obligations we have incurred in the field of social legislation with regard to the aged, the sick, pensioners and so on, so we cannot immediately achieve the elimination of fees. Gradually we should move toward the elimination of fees for all types of education at all levels, and it should be done in such a way that the elimination of those fees does not constitute a subsidy by the rest of the population directly for students.

One suggestion made by the Canadian Union of Students interested me very much, and I am sure members of the house will want to consider it. It was that some day we might convert the loans into scholarship

achievement funds. In other words, if a student borrowed \$1,000 per year, the maximum amount he is entitled to borrow, and successfully completed his university year he would be entitled to an automatic discharge of the obligation. In effect, this would become a retroactive, non-repayable bursary to him if he proved by his attainments at university that he had used the loan to good advantage.

As I have said, we must approach this subject keeping in mind the limits of the resources this country has already committed in other spheres. I should like to congratulate the minister upon extending certain of the provisions of this legislation and we look forward some day to the enlargement of the scope of this measure. As I said in answer to a question earlier today, I say these things not in any sense of criticism or in any breach of solidarity with my colleagues but for the future improvement of this very liberal piece of legislation.

Mr. R. W. Prittie (Burnaby-Richmond): Mr. Speaker, I must agree with the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Diefenbaker) that it is rather unusual for a member of the cabinet to enter the debate at this point. I suppose the minister has a responsibility, as the member for St. Lawrence-St. George, to the many students who go to Sir George Williams University. However, I got the impression it was a leadership speech.

I should like to make a few comments, some of which are prompted by the remarks made by the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert). He seems to be worried about the number of people in university. I think I am right in saying that these loans are available to students who attend the various technical institutes of the country today as well as the community colleges which are now coming into existence. They are not restricted to university students. I do not agree with the contention of the hon. member for Edmonton West that the universities are clogged with people who should not be there, who are not intellectually able to attain a university education. My impression is that in the last few years the universities have been raising their standards of admission. I know this is the case in my own province, so people cannot get in as easily today as they could in the past. I am glad I do not have to do it over again because I am not sure I would meet all the standards.