

Canada Student Loans Act (No. 2)

ing current student assistance programs. We are aware, however, that after twenty years, it is time to change some of the plan's basic elements to allow for rising costs of higher education and the socio-economic climate confronting the student today. The changes we are proposing involve additional funding of \$60 million, to be paid over two years. In my view, these changes should not be seen as just amendments to a specific piece of legislation but as one of the basic elements of a broader objective, which is to make education accessible to all Canadian students and to maximize development of human resources.

My colleague, the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Axworthy), has established a national training program which includes the Skill Growth Fund and the Critical Trade Skills Training Program. In addition, the Minister of State for Economic Development and the Minister of State for Science and Technology (Mr. Johnston) has been collaborating with other Ministers on improving the direction and structure of research and technology development, especially in terms of the joint effort being made in this area by Government, industry and the academic world.

These initiatives and others of a similar nature, to which will be added the proposed changes in the Canada Student Loans Act, are all part of a group of proposals that reflect the changing character of higher education and of our economy.

[*English*]

I would now like to indicate to the House the three main concerns which are addressed in Bill C-161 and to explain their importance to Canadian students.

The first concern pertains to loan limits. The present weekly loan limit is \$56.25, a limit which was based on a previous annual limit of \$1,800 set in 1974. We know that a 1983 dollar and a 1974 dollar do not have the same purchasing power, hence the need for an upward revision in the loan limit. The Bill now before the House proposes increasing the weekly loan limit from \$56.25 to \$100 a week, with some provision for escalation as required.

The Bill also takes into account the needs of students pursuing long-term studies. It is obvious, for example, that students pursuing medicine, law or post-graduate studies will require loans over a longer period than students following a three-year undergraduate or community college program. We are, therefore, advocating in this Bill dropping the lifetime limit of what students can borrow, which presently stands at \$9,800, and replacing it by a simple limit of ten years. It has been generally agreed that dollar levels will be established which will be used as guidelines by Provinces to monitor the debt load of individual students.

The increase in loan limits to \$100 a week will not satisfy—everyone, but in a time of economic restraint we had to look at a scale of assistance that we could deal with, thus the determination to see if we can help those who need help most.

This brings me to the second main concern with which we deal in this Bill, the client group served. The present Canada

Student Loans Program applies only to full-time students, but in today's society there is another population with very real needs as they pursue post-secondary education. I am referring to part-time students, both at universities and community colleges. This group of students has been making known its needs over the years. COPUS has made many representations. COPUS, the Canadian Organization of Part-Time University Students, represents over 250,000 students and as such reflects a real and growing constituency.

In recognizing the needs of part-time students we are recognizing the evolution of Canadian society. For instance, as women become a larger percentage of the labour force, part-time studies often provide them with a bridge between child rearing and employment. In many cases in the past, part-time students simply have not had the funds available to pursue the courses which could add to their future employability. This has meant a loss to the work force, particularly in regard to professional and skilled positions.

Under the Bill before the House, part-time students taking post-secondary courses accepted by the designated institution as credit toward a degree, diploma or certificate will qualify for a loan. There are, of course, various limitations to this provision. The course must be equivalent to a course that may be taken by a full-time student as part of a program of studies of at least 12 consecutive weeks' duration. The applicant must demonstrate a need for assistance as measured by a means test. The loan will cover the cost of tuition, books, transportation, child care and miscellaneous allowances.

At the present time it is difficult to predict how many part-time students would qualify for assistance under this new provision, but we anticipate that more than 20,000 to 30,000 students a year might apply.

The third main area of concern which we address in this Bill relates to the problems which many students are encountering when they complete their education and attempt to enter the labour force. The transition from university to the work place, which at one time could be accomplished within a space of one to four months, is no longer an easy transition.

As I see the clock, Mr. Speaker, I would like to stop at this point and resume the debate at two o'clock.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. It being one o'clock, I do now leave the Chair until two o'clock this afternoon.

At 1 p.m. the House took recess.

[*English*]

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

Mr. Joyal: Mr. Speaker, I would like to continue the presentation of the content and core of this Bill. As I was reminding Hon. Members before we adjourned for the lunch-