

S. O. 52

MOTION TO ADJOURN UNDER S. O. 52

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION—ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, I rise under the provisions of Standing Order 52 to seek leave to adjourn the House for the purpose of discussing a matter of urgent and pressing concern, namely, the proposed changes in regulations affecting post-secondary education programs for aboriginal Canadians.

These proposed changes have been universally rejected by the aboriginal community across Canada. The proposed regulations, together with the attendant proposed cap on funding, would have the opposite effect of what the Government claims. If this capping is proceeded with, instead of achieving genuine equality of access to higher education, it will have the exact reverse effect.

If you rule in favour of the motion, Mr. Speaker, I would be only too happy to participate in the debate and put forward more relevant information in this context. It is time for more justice not less justice for aboriginal Canadians.

Mr. Speaker: I should say to Hon. Members and to the public that I am quite sure there is great concern about this issue. As is appropriate, some time ago I received notice of the application that has just been heard. I have given it some very careful consideration. It is also important to understand that the Speaker must exercise some care in the granting of an emergency debate, that the issue is not whether the matter is important, but whether it can be pursued in this House in another way.

• (1130)

I say to the Hon. Member for Oshawa (Mr. Broadbent), who has eloquently spoken on this issue, as have other Members, that the Speaker views this matter as one of very great concern and importance. It is not very often that the Speaker will indicate to Hon. Members what I am about to say but, I think on this issue I will. As the Member for Vancouver South and as someone very concerned with this matter, I have also as a Member of Parliament been involved and am involved in ongoing discussions concerning this issue. I say that to indicate that I have some very great concerns, as have other Members.

It is, however, my duty to rule procedurally on this issue. I have to say that at least under the circumstances at the moment, it is not appropriate to proceed with an emergency debate. However, for all of us who are deeply concerned about the issue and who feel great concern for some of the young people involved, the fact that I cannot rule for an emergency debate does not mean that it is not unimportant. It is a very difficult issue for all of us in this House.

I thank the Hon. Member for Oshawa for bringing the matter forward.

Mr. Skelly (Comox—Alberni): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Given the very strong feelings on this issue, the fact that the matter should be debated in the House and that the Government should present its case for capping post-secondary funding, could you ask the House for unanimous consent to debate the issue when Orders of the Day are called later today?

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member I know rises with concern and sincerity, which concern is shared by Hon. Members on all sides of the House, but we are confined in applications for emergency debates to a statement by the Member who is applying. The reason we are so confined is that the Reform Committee, which did such useful work in the last few years, made it very clear that in applications for emergency debates, it is for the most part not appropriate for even the Speaker to give reasons why the Speaker approves or disapproves or allows or does not allow an emergency debate.

Furthermore, the rules are very clear that only the Member who is applying for the emergency debate is permitted to speak on it, and there are certain restraints on what the Member can say. The difficulty with this is that the Hon. Member who has just risen—and I understand and sympathize with his concern and sincerity—is starting to argue a case. The difficulty is that under the rules we are moving into debate.

As was pointed out by the Hon. Minister of Justice (Mr. Lewis) some days ago, this creates a situation in which the other side of this question cannot be heard. In other words, I cannot recognize a Minister of the Crown to argue in reply the merits of the issue being raised. I am in a position, as Hon. Members know, in which I will have to come before this House very soon with some statements in connection with what is and what is not appropriate in an application for an emergency debate.