

The people of Canada and myself would have hoped that, when it came to pieces of legislation to make the economy healthier or to humanize our society, to reform our tax system, to change the veterans program or improve the pension plan, to reduce the federal deficit or to deal with investment in small businesses, the Liberal opposition in this place would have found a way to support this government's initiatives in the past nine years.

Instead, honourable senators, the Official Opposition has consistently tried to make us believe that there was always more money that could be drawn from the Canadian Government Consolidated Revenue Fund, that we could spend more and tax less. Senator MacEachen is the first one to admit he is concerned, and to come up with figures that make us think about how heavily in debt the federal government has been over the past 12 or 13 years and, in particular, how fast the provincial debt has grown over the past few years.

On every occasion the Official Opposition decided against supporting the government, and Bill C-76 is no exception. Senator Perrault's amendment is further proof that the Official Opposition in this house continues to hold such beliefs. The Liberal Party of Canada is certainly the only group in Canada to believe that Canadians can afford more and more social programs with less and less taxes, while containing or reducing the deficit.

You have probably gathered, honourable senators, that I cannot support this amendment. I remind you that this bill will not bring to the Treasury, in 1993-94 and 1994-95, \$30 million as claimed by the government, but more likely much less, maybe around \$10 million in 1994-95. I hope that, in the meantime, the government will keep its promise to look at the whole loan program. I can tell you that it was only natural to me, partisan as I am, to say publicly: How can a government go into an election with such a program? It is only after careful study of the bill that I got the answer. First of all, there will be no cost involved this year for new graduates and probably almost none in the following year, because loans... Senator Thériault is nodding in disagreement, but he must admit, as I just said, that new loans approved this year will not carry any additional payment in 1993-94 due to this bill, because these loans will not become due until next year, and then in part only.

I think that students will understand and will want to do their bit to improve the fiscal situation of the federal government.

Hon. L. Norbert Thériault: Honourable senators, I must say one more time that I am disappointed. I do not want to participate at length in this debate, but I had hoped that Senator Simard, this time, would do what students were

expecting him to do! I had a meeting with some students from the University of Moncton last week and they were convinced that the Canadian Student Federation had the support of Senator Simard who, they thought, would vote against the bill.

I would simply like to ask a question. I will not debate all the partisan and political aspects of the election campaign which is supposed to finally take place, I hope, in 1993. They are following in the footsteps of the previous Hatfield government and staying until the end of their term!

When the time comes to hold that debate in New Brunswick, I will do it with Senator Simard. Let New Brunswickers decide who is right or who is wrong. That will be the time to do it! Here we are talking serious business!

I want to put to Senator Simard this question sincerely, because I want to get the information: Will this bill affect the loans which have already been given, for example, to students who will graduate in 1993? Yes or no?

Senator Simard: No, I think that all senators, including those on your side, who read the bill and who listened to the explanations both from officials and ministers, will tell you that that is not the case. We are only talking about the new loans which will be given later this year, after the bill is passed. Only those will be affected.

Senator Thériault: Not for loans already granted?

Senator Simard: No.

Senator Thériault: I would like to ask him another question but I am not sure he can answer.

Everyone knows, and certainly government officials know, that all the provinces have more or less abolished the bursary programs. From now on, students will increasingly depend on loans. In Quebec, this is not quite true yet, but all provinces are headed in that direction. Therefore, in the future, if student loans are still available, as they are today whatever the system is, the amounts borrowed will double on the average. That is why students who have examined the bill object to it and not only because of the six-month interest period on, let us say, \$12,000 on the average today. More likely it will be on a \$24,000 loan. I am using figures—

Senator Simard: Senator Thériault, the average amount of loans students carry at the end of their studies is closer to \$6,000 or \$7,000; not \$24,000.

I imagine some students, in medical schools or what have you will accumulate as much as \$24,000 in debt. Indeed, the maximum is much higher than that. However, the national average is around \$6,500 or \$7,000.