

Canada Student Loans Act

Hon. John N. Turner (Member of the Administration): Mr. Speaker, I should like to speak generally and briefly on the amendments to the Canada Student Loans Act. When it was first introduced I of course spoke at greater length on the philosophy behind the bill and what it would mean to students throughout the country as a means of continuing their education with some sort of financial support from the federal government.

● (3:40 p.m.)

I wish to speak about three of its aspects. First of all, I want to reiterate to the house and suggest to the minister that despite the fact that this has been a very liberal piece of legislation—and has accomplished a good deal toward equalizing educational opportunity in this country—I would hope that its terms would be broadened in the future to include many students who are not presently covered. I wish to speak in particular about part-time and night-time students. In our larger cities the number of students attending university on their own time in the evenings and at their own expense reaches rather large proportions. In two of the universities that happen to be situated in the riding of St. Lawrence-St. George in Montreal 15,000 out of the 30,000 students attending those universities do so at night time, and judging from figures I have received the same situation applies to a certain degree in the other large metropolitan sections of this country, particularly in Toronto, Hamilton and Vancouver.

Mr. Diefenbaker: May I ask the minister a question? He is in the rather unusual position of a minister in a cabinet advising another minister on what the latter should do. I am wondering whether these representations which he is now making to the house would not have been more effective had they been made where they should have been made by a minister, namely, in the cabinet. I have never seen this done before, but one learns new things every day in parliament.

Mr. Turner: I rather think the right hon. Leader of the Opposition would not wish me to reply to that question knowing that I am bound, as he was, by the Privy Council oath. However, I wish to point out that my intervention is in no way a criticism of this legislation. I am looking forward to the possibility of other aspects of this legislation being extended. I totally approve of the bill as it was introduced and, of course, of the reasons behind these amendments, but I am taking advantage of second reading to make a few

comments on how I hope this legislation will be developed in the future and how I think we should react to the support of our students in this country.

I wish to make it perfectly clear that I am speaking not in criticism of government policy but hoping, as I would imagine many members of this house are, that its terms will be broadened in future years.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I think the minister did not get my point. Is he saying that it is constitutionally proper for a minister, during the discussion of a measure brought before parliament by another minister, to explain that, while the measure is a worthy one, it would be a lot better if his suggestions were carried out? Surely that is not quite constitutional. I am not asking him in any way to contravene the oath he has taken as Privy Councillor but I have never before seen an instance of a minister explaining to another minister that while his legislation is good it could have been better.

Mr. Turner: I had the benefit of sitting in the opposition while the right hon. gentleman was prime minister of this country and I recall a number of such occasions then and also during the period I have been sitting on the government side of the house. There is nothing preventing a minister or member of the government from making certain comments on legislation. I can uphold the constitutional position I am taking on the basis of precedents.

Mr. Diefenbaker: There are no precedents.

Mr. Turner: I am sure there are precedents, Mr. Speaker, and I find myself in no unusual position. I am sure that hon. members on our side of the house will welcome in the future any criticism made at this stage of certain aspects of this legislation. I hope that some day the definition of a student will be enlarged beyond the one that is in the present act in which it is limited to a full-time student at a post-secondary institution. I hope that some day we will be able to in that definition include night-time and part-time students, especially as they are particularly deserving because after having worked eight or nine hours in a day they use their own free time to further their education.

I also wish to say that a subject which disturbs me is that reciprocity has not yet been achieved between the Canada Student Loans Act and the Quebec Student Loans Act: Despite the fact that in the province of