

### 13. EDITORIAL: Student Loans and Statism

Educators, those run-of-the mill philosophers of democracy, are usually expert at perceiving the most remote connections between democracy and behavior. Yet they will sometimes impose the strictest canons of relevance and direct causation on the same set of connections.

They will regulate student activities, espouse the liberal arts, abet inter-collegiate sports, fight outside criticism, and appoint committees with bold insistence on the infrangible nexus between the subject at hand and democracy. But only the faintest concern is expressed when the great national bureaucracy heaves its corpus and bears forth a new program in education, such as is now occurring in the field of student loans.

Last year Congress appropriated several million dollars to lend money to "needy" students and this year the President will ask for and the Congress will probably provide ten times as much. The program is expected to grow steadily from year to year, unless the sister program of federal scholarship grants grows faster. Terms of the loans are loose, to the point where some abuse is inevitable, and will probably loosen further to the point where abuse becomes superfluous.

The program is favored by colleges. Money earmarked for loans today can be spent for unrestricted purposes tomorrow. Thus the loan program becomes, in effect, a general subsidy to higher education. Poor students not now helped by university funds, students with uncooperative families, and students who want to spend more on other things can continue in school. (Research into these conditions is inadequate.) Little is said about the likelihood that many mediocre students, but few bright ones, will be carried by loans to a college degree.

The program is favored by many Congressmen too, if only because, if pressed to speak, they can declare that they put your children and mine through college.

The program is moving in on top of a layer of college loan funds hitherto sufficient in most cases (few students wish to borrow on present one to four year terms), also on top of a layer of loan funds provided by banks, foundations, and, in Maine and Massachusetts, by a government guarantee arrangement. It appears too that new private groups have begun to move into the field.

In fact, it is estimated that four million dollars of a trust fund, provided by a person, an association, a foundation, a city, or a State can be used to guarantee loans equal to the 40-odd millions that may be appropriated. We may not doubt the sincerity of the President's recent proclamation of economy, but here is a chance for economy. We may not doubt the President's desire to let private agencies do what government need not do, but here is a chance to embody the doctrine. How easy does a voluntary solution have to be in order to forestall a new government program? Is the doctrine of limited government quite dead? When will the political philosophers relieve us of its body?

This incident exposes the weakness of applied political science. Leaders lack principle, or cannot elicit relevant facts, or cannot construct alternative practical possibilities. Social science has helped them little. The flight to the particular has so drained its brainpower and heartpower that Graham Wallas' "unworked mine of political invention" is still idle after fifty years.