

US student loans

Lean prospects

Washington

Students from across the United States are planning to converge on Washington next Monday for a mass demonstration on Capitol Hill against cuts proposed in federal support for student loans. The demonstration is part of an intense, nationwide lobbying campaign by both students and university administrators aimed at persuading Congress to reject the Reagan Administration's cuts.

The Administration points to the escalating costs of the loan support programme, largely a result of recent increases in US interest rates to record high levels, and is seeking to reduce federal subsidies from an estimated \$3,000 million in 1980 to \$1,600 million by 1983.

Graduate students will be among those heavily affected by the cuts. Under the government's Guaranteed Student Loan (GSL) programme, graduates qualify for loans at a fixed 9 per cent interest rate; under new proposals from the Department of Education, they would now be allowed to borrow only from an auxiliary loan programme at significantly higher costs, with an interest rate of 14 per cent.

The result, according to figures prepared by the American Council on Education (ACE), is that a student who borrows \$8,000 a year on top of previous undergraduate loans to make his or her way through graduate school could be paying off the money at a rate of about \$500 a month for the succeeding ten years.

The presidents of almost all the nation's universities and colleges have loudly denounced the proposed cuts, claiming that by discouraging students from entering graduate training unless their sources of income are secure, the Administration is discriminating against groups who lack this security and undermining the long-term economic health of the nation.

Many feel that they had accepted last year's 20–25 per cent cuts in student loan support as their appropriate share of broader efforts to reduce federal spending. The new cuts, which in some cases would reduce federal subsidies by up to 50 per cent, have provoked the feeling that students are being asked to carry an unfair burden of Mr Reagan's economic policies.

The Reagan Administration's proposals are a mixture of economic pragmatism and ideological conviction that federal subsidies should be confined to the "truly needy". At present, under the GSL programme the government pays the 9 per cent interest on loans for both undergraduate and graduate students while they are at college, and also pays the difference between 9 per cent and the current interest rate for the remaining period of the loan.

Mr Terrel H. Bell, the Education Secretary, said in Washington soon after the budget proposals were announced that,

as a result of soaring interest rates, the cost of administering the guaranteed loans, \$367 million in 1977, is expected to rise to \$3,400 million in 1983.

Reducing the eligibility requirements for the guaranteed loans and shifting the graduate students to the auxiliary loan programme would, claims the Administration, not only ensure that the available loans go to those most in need, but that the total costs to the federal government would be decreased by more than \$2,000 million by 1987.

Many of the leading research universities, however, claim that such cuts would have a devastating impact. Dr Edward J. Bloustein, president of Rutgers University in New Jersey, believes they would eliminate more than \$12 million in aid received by about half of the 4,000 graduate students at his university.

According to figures produced by ACE, about 600,000 graduate students — half of those at present enrolled in US universities — are borrowing money under the GSL programme, in many cases close to the limit of \$5,000 a year. At some of the nation's

leading private research universities, the cost of graduate education, including living and tuition expenses, can be as much as \$13,000 a year and university officials argue that, if they are forced to seek the more expensive loans, many students will either give up or delay their graduate education.

Given the extent of popular support for the student loan programme, the proposed reductions are expected to be strongly opposed by Congress.

In their defence, Administration officials reply that the present loan programme "encourages students to borrow regardless of financial need from their first year at school and can needlessly cause students to amass high levels of debt" which in turn allows "decreased reliance on family savings and student work". They also point to other initiatives, such as the efforts by the National Science Foundation to support graduate students in science and engineering, as proof that the government is prepared to continue support where it feels it to be necessary and appropriate.

David Dickson

Indian Antarctic expedition

Going for good

New Delhi

The Indian government, which sent its first expedition to Antarctica last month, is now actively considering the establishment of a permanent Antarctic base by 1985 or even earlier. Until then, the government intends to operate an unmanned weather station that will be linked via the polar Sun-synchronous satellite that India hopes to

launch next year. The Antarctic programme is also considered essential to raise India's prestige among littoral states and to give it more weight in international forums on Indian Ocean affairs.

Although many of the Antarctic treaty powers have welcomed India to their club, India does not intend to sign the treaty immediately. It is, however, likely to stake territorial claims if the treaty members do not adopt the common heritage principle.

The Indian expedition was not advertised in advance for fear of adverse



reactions from Antarctic treaty members. But, as it turned out, the reaction was quite favourable. The Indian team on board the chartered Norwegian ship *Polarsirkel* not only received weather reports from bases in Antarctica but also navigational help from the Japanese icebreaker *Fuji*.

The 21-member team led by Dr S. Z. Qasim landed on 9 January at a location 70° 3'S and 40° 7'E — an abandoned Soviet campsite. The Indians named the place "Dakshin (South) Gangotri". (Gangotri is the source of the River Ganges in the Himalayas.) The team left Antarctica after camping for 10 days, bringing back a tonne of rocks, several samples of ice and aerosols. One notable observation by the team was an unrecorded undersea mount in the Indian Ocean which has now been named Mt Indira after the Indian Prime Minister.

Plans are also under way to set up an Antarctic Research Centre in India for training manpower, developing research programmes and working out the logistics of base support with the help of air force planes. The Department of Ocean Development is also planning to buy a ship for Antarctic work. One vessel under consideration is the 3,600 tonne *HMS Endurance*, the British Antarctic patrol ship, now for sale at a price of £1.5 million.

There are several reasons for India's new-found interest in Antarctica. Politically India does not want to be left behind China, which is planning to set up a

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K. S. Jayaraman