

Government Orders

I want to talk for a moment, as I said, about this report from the ministry of health. It has recorded, it has done some studying and it appoints various people. In August, the chairperson of the Canada Pension Plan Advisory Board received a letter from the Minister of National Health and Welfare expressing concern regarding the provisions governing eligibility for disability benefits under the Canada Pension Plan. In particular, the minister requested that the board examine current provisions regarding regency and retroactivity with a view to determining whether any changes were necessary.

After some consultation by the board on retroactivity: "The plan also provides that no person shall be deemed to have become disabled earlier than 15 months before the month in which the application for disability is received. Departmental officials suggested that it would be very difficult, in many cases, to establish the onset of disability fairly if the retroactive period was extended beyond 15 months".

We have got case after case. Its figures show that as much as 5 per cent or 6 per cent of the applicants who have paid into the Canada pension scheme are disqualified because they did not apply at the proper time. They paid into a pension scheme and because they thought they were going to get better or possibly because they were getting money from unemployment insurance or possibly from some other source, they did not apply. All of a sudden someone informs them that there is a disability pension under the Canada pension. Finally, they come to make their application and are told: "Oh, I am sorry but you are disqualified now". If someone is disabled and has the credits, surely to goodness if he has not applied in time all the ministry has done is save itself a bunch of money, and the longer it takes for him to apply the more money the ministry does not have to pay.

There are provisions that would safeguard the plan because the retroactivity only goes back for one year. If someone is disabled in 1980, comes forward in 1990, has paid into the plan and can prove that they were disabled, surely to goodness the plan should be laid out in such a way that they could say: "Yes, you are entitled to it because you have paid into it, but you will only get it retroactive for one year".

That is not how the plan works. Many people out there are finding themselves in a situation in which they did not know because many of them do not have their trade unions to tell them that these provisions are there.

Canada pension has not really given out the kind of information with regard to disability pensions because we questioned the officials on that. Clearly we have got a situation in which the bill, the Canada Pension Plan Act, must be changed. Bill C-39 addresses one very little area and we are going to support it. We definitely will be supporting it because it is an improvement.

However, I do not want to leave the impression that we have done our job. There is a big job to be done there.

I heard the Liberals speaking with regard to the problems with the disabled and so on. I want to ask the Liberals: where were you between 1966 and 1984? Those same things that are going on right now were going on during that period of time and you could have gone into this legislation and tried to redraft it, but you did not.

I would hope the kind of atmosphere that went on in that legislative committee and in the hearing, and the kind of compassion that was coming from all sides of the House, will prevail and we will sit down as a committee and start to look at revising the whole Canada Pension Plan Act and not just these small portions of it.

There are other areas of horrendous problems within the Canada Pension Plan. I can recall several people who had received their disability pension and received a back cheque for somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$17,000, \$18,000, \$20,000 and were not told that it was taxable. They were not advised that it was taxable. Goodness knows if you are disabled and you have got these problems and it takes so long to get your cheque, and it is a retroactive cheque, you need the money and you spend the money. Then in April they are told that they have income tax to pay on that and they must pay it. Again, there is another area.

I have been advised by people in the department that there are some changes coming with regard to the income tax, it will be deducted at source and I am pleased to hear that. I was very pleased to hear that kind of co-operation coming from that department and from the department heads. They realize the seriousness of the bill and the inequities.