

*Canada Pension Plan*

Canadian society recognizing the service that volunteers give, to take some of the revenues of Government and apply them to the purchase of these credits so that entitlement can be built up. The Government, which surely values volunteer services, must find the educational, health and social services enormously enriched by the contributions of volunteers. My proposal calls on the Government to recognize those obligations, those contributions, accept the obligation and do something tangible about that recognition. It calls upon the Government to ensure that persons who could not otherwise gain Canada Pension Plan entitlement to have it in return for the services they render to society.

This proposal is one whose time has come. I look forward to debate on this matter and the possibility that the Government might very seriously consider the matter.

● (1820)

*[Translation]*

**Mrs. Gabrielle Bertrand (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare):** Mr. Speaker, each year, usually in April, we devote a full week to the voluntary sector, and we do it because voluntary work is becoming increasingly important in our society and deserves recognition. Indeed, an increasing number of people are interested in the voluntary sector, as evidenced by the fact that, in 1980, which is unfortunately the last year for which we have the figures, over 2.7 million Canadians, or 15 per cent of our population, did voluntary work. According to Statistics Canada, about 350 million hours of work were given freely in 1980. This would represent the work of about 220,000 paid full-time workers for a full year. It means an average of 137 hours of work for each volunteer, or approximately three hours a week. All this represents goods and which must be added to the Gross National Product and which amount at a few billion dollars a year. We know that there are over 50,000 charity organizations registered at Revenue Canada, without mentioning all the voluntary groups which, without being registered, still provide useful services to their respective communities.

The importance of voluntary action, both as a social force and as an essential element of the Canadian way of life, is being increasingly recognized. It is more and more strongly that many services offered by volunteers and their deep devotion to their work puts them on another level than those services provided by paid workers. Reinforcement of the voluntary sector is seen as a means to improve the ability of society to meet the social and health needs of the Canadian population. The voluntary sector is often more able to identify the needs of various segments of the population and find adequate answers to those needs, than the Government system. The contribution of the voluntary sector to the development of our societies and the improvement of the living standards of our fellow citizens has been tremendous and undeniable. I am therefore not in any way minimizing the value of that input even if I do not agree with the motion put forward today by the Hon. Member for Thunder Bay—Nipigon (Mr. Epp).

Under the motion of the Hon. Member, the Government should consider paying Canada Pension Plan benefits to persons not making contributions to the Plan in proportion to the time they have dedicated to voluntary work activities. At first glance, such a suggestion seems to deserve our full support, for it reaches into our deep feelings of appreciation and gratitude for those who do voluntary work. We would therefore be tempted to support it wholeheartedly. However, by supporting that motion, we would only be creating more and more inequities as well as undermining the basic principles of the Canada Pension Plan. Let me elaborate for a moment on the problems of unfairness that could arise from the implementation of the motion before us tonight.

For the purposes of this debate, I have spent some time trying to identify the actual reality of that activity, voluntary activity, and that is when I realized the sheer complexity of this matter, Mr. Speaker. All the studies carried out on this subject, and it is true that they have been few, agree that there are two networks of voluntary work: a formal network, the only one in fact that we can assess, and an informal one. The formal network basically includes voluntary work carried out through associations of voluntary groups, whereas the informal network deals with individual forms of voluntary work. It would be a mistake to believe that any voluntary action has to be collective or organized. On the contrary, voluntary activities are often carried out by people acting spontaneously within a group or privately, alone or with two or three other people, and it is clear in my mind that no system of recognition of that voluntary action can be complete unless it takes into account individual, non collective, non organized contributions.

Trying to assess quantitatively and qualitatively the contribution of volunteers involved in the official network would represent a major endeavour; but we can only start to imagine how difficult it would be to try to assess the contribution of volunteers involved in the unofficial network. Then again, should we create classes of volunteers by setting up a petty regulation which would recognize volunteer work on condition that it is visible, institutionalized, registered, done within the framework of recognized groups operating under a corporate name and with Government approval?

*People In Action*, the report on voluntary action to the Government of Canada warned us against such an approach and recommended not to enclose voluntary action within well-defined categories.

Above all, the integration of volunteer workers to the Canada Pension Plan would require Government interference in volunteer work, which from now on would be subjected to constant monitoring and control. Indeed, how could we grant benefits under the Canada Pension Plan proportional to the time spent in voluntary work without computing this time? And how could we compute it without setting up a heavy and cumbersome bureaucracy?

It is not easy to quantify voluntary action, because its various shape and form is determined by the various needs it tries to meet. I suggest that we should not try to impose a