

Canada Pension Plan

plan of the kind embodied in Bill No. C-136. Since that time many features of the plan have been modified, and I am certainly not ashamed that we have made these modifications. We have listened to advice; we have responded to expert suggestions, and we have taken the views of the provinces into account. We would not have got the advice or the views if we had not begun by putting forward a definite proposition for consideration.

I would not suggest for a moment that we have accepted every view put forward by each of the provinces regarding the plan. That is obviously not possible, but we think we have accepted the best of the views which were put forward and which will fit into one package.

However, the fundamental features of the Canada pension plan have not changed. It was never intended to provide instant pensions. It was and it is a plan to build on to old age security a pension related to earnings. The additional pension never has been suggested as a benefit for people who have already stopped earning. On the contrary, we have always said that there would be a 10 year transition period, and the only suggestions in that regard have been that it should have been longer, not that it should have been shorter, with the result that fewer Canadians would be entitled to full benefits.

We have sought to make the new pension available, to quote the white paper, "as soon as is possible in a fair and practicable way". We have always been careful to define the objective as being to ensure that people "will be able to look forward to retiring in security and with dignity".

Mr. Chatterton: All Canadians.

Miss LaMarsh: We have not claimed that a contributory plan can do the same thing for people who cannot look forward to retirement but are already retired. Nevertheless the main line of criticism was, until very lately, not that we were doing too little but that we were attempting too much. The criticism was that the transition period was too short. The view of some critics was that it should be 20 years, and the view of others was that it should be 40 years.

Mr. Knowles: Please identify those critics.

Miss LaMarsh: I am sure my hon. friend has watched the press as closely as I have in the last couple of years, and if there is anyone in the chamber who does not need to have these critics identified it is my hon. friend.

There was criticism as well that the indexing features, the first ever applied on this continent, were too radical. Others criticized the benefits on retirement and to survivors as being too generous. There was talk of over-pensioning people. We might have listened to these critics, of course. If we had taken a 40 year transition period the Canada pension plan would have benefited only those Canadians now under the age of 25; or if we had accepted a 20 year transition period it would have benefited only those now under 45. We might also have had instant pensions with full benefit on the payment of a month's contribution, that is with no transition period, but who would there have been then to explain why Mr. X, who retired the day before the plan began had a flat rate pension of \$75 and Mr. Y, who retired after making one month's contributory payment, had a full pension of \$179?

We might have dropped the indexing, so that in future years the dollar return would have been less and less to those who had made contributions during the whole of their working lifetime, and have left it to each successive parliament to decide whether the fund could bear a succession of increases from time to time, thus adding further impetus to something which I know is decried by all hon. members, an election auction for the vote of the aged at the cost of the then taxpayers. We might also have ignored the social need for assistance to the disabled worker, his dependants and survivors, and have left out these expensive benefits.

But we honestly tried in the last two years to find a balance. We were making a start and our eyes had to be on the long term goal of what was going to be the effect for the foreseeable future in Canada as well as at present and during the transition period of 10 years. We are encouraged that even in a parliament where the government is a minority we have found general support for these views.

Now, however, the critics attack us on the so-called gaps in the plan. In fact the plan applies to almost everyone who is working. The only limitation is the practical one that account cannot be taken of work which produces only very small earnings. But the only people excluded on those grounds—

The Chairman: Order. I have to interrupt the minister on more than one count. For one thing, I doubt whether her remarks are entirely relevant to the resolution now before us. Second, we are getting close to one o'clock,