

Canada Pension Plan (No. 2)

will get no uplift; if they are in poverty, they will remain there. Of course, this is the flaw if the potential return is geared solely to earnings, and this is an aspect which requires careful consideration.

I know we do not assume that the whole program of security is vested in or rests upon the Canada Pension Plan, but I was looking through the latest report a while ago and I saw some figures which were pretty upsetting. The average amounts of monthly benefits in March 1971 were as follows: retirement pension, \$23.03. We know the CPP had not run its full course, but \$23.03 is a pretty small amount. The widow's pension was \$59.38. Even the improved figures—and we welcome and salute them—which the minister mentioned tonight, and I presume I have them somewhere in my voluminous files, show a maximum of \$109.60 in December, 1974.

According to my arithmetic, the figure is something like \$1,619.52 a year. I think that the Senate poverty report set out \$2,650.00 a year per person as the poverty level, plus OAS if he is old enough. As I said earlier, I am not suggesting that the whole plan rests upon this, but we have to realize that we are not dealing here with any great generosity. I do not think the minister can be accused by anyone of recklessness. I think these projected figures are by no means too high, and indeed we must constantly improve the lot of the people of this country, and especially of those in the upper age bracket.

Another group which we must consider—and it is always a pleasure to look at this group—is the group of women in our society. I think that in this age of enlightenment—I look at a particular expert on this, the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) who was so well honoured in his native province the other day—we must look into our existing legislation. I do not believe it is sufficient to say that the housekeeper, the mother, the wife is not in every way entitled to become a full-fledged participant in the Canada Pension Plan. I do not think that she need be tagged in there as a dependent. I would like to see the housewife become, not the dependent of the male wage earner but enter into the plan in her own right.

● (2040)

I think that is not only the proper treatment for a very important segment of the kind of society which we believe in and which we have, but the people who know these things in an actuarial way, my business friends and colleagues in my party who have learned how to make money—something I have never been able to do—and who understand economics tell me that this would strengthen and improve the plan itself. Certainly it would do a great deal to recognize—to use an old-fashioned expression, and I do not know whether it is adequate at the present time—the equality of the sexes. This is an area I am looking forward to discussing in greater detail. I am sure my colleagues, particularly the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald), will want to express views further to and in elucidation of those which have already been advanced by her.

Although I know other ministers are not bringing forward very much legislation, I think this minister, with his activity, is allowing the House, indeed prompting the House to take a careful look at the whole question of care

[Mr. Macquarrie.]

for the aged. Last week it was legislation for the young, for the children. We have got miles to go in reference to the disabled. I do not know whether it is because the two parties are nearly in balance now, whether the people of Canada believe that it will not be too long before there may be changes, but I have found an absolutely phenomenal increase in my correspondence. My staff have found it too, as a matter of fact. The magnitude of the problems people are facing in this field is simply overwhelming. I think it is well that we are dealing with these questions, trying to make the best of what is available, to bring our best thoughts to bear on improving the lot of our people.

I would say that we are just beginning to get into the orange paper. When I first spoke on it some months ago, I said then that the references to the Canada Pension Plan and to family allowances were the two things I could detect as tangibles. We have to go a lot farther than that. I think in this country we will have to move into more serious consideration of integrating our whole concept of the well-being of our citizens. I think we will have to look into private pension plans. I think we will have to consider carefully those people who are excluded from existing plans. We must look with far more generosity and compassion on the disabled. I received a letter just last week from a man who cannot get out of his bed, who has one retarded child, two other children and a wife working at low wages. He gets \$60 a month. How do you answer a man like that? What do you say?

So I say to the minister—I know some of my colleagues will be picking up the detailed provisions in the bill—that he need not worry about passage of this measure. I enjoyed his remarks very much. I think, from what I can gather, that the meetings which he had with the provincial ministers were fruitful and useful. I was impressed by the communique. We will be asking some further questions in committee, but we want to expedite this measure, to help the 500,000 people he has mentioned to gain some improvement in their status, to give them some support in their attempts to cope with the cost of living situation which is very painful, very prevalent; and for so far as this goes to improve the lot of our fellow citizens, naturally we support and will support the passage of the bill. We look forward to the minister's next performance, and we will give him that same attentive, sincere, impartial, non-political assistance which we have always vouchsafed him in all his efforts.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, in spite of my effort this afternoon to get a procedural ruling that would permit private members to make amendments to this bill, and in spite of the fact that we may still try, I want to say at the outset that we very warmly welcome Bill C-224. I noticed the valiant effort of the hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie) to say that in reverse. I thought he succeeded in doing it very nicely by saying he was not against the bill. He leaves me no option but to come right out and say that we welcome it; but of course I can always add the phrase "so far as it goes".

I noted the minister's statement on why he is presenting two bills to deal with the matters to which the federal government and the provinces have agreed, namely, that the items in this bill are so important, and that it is so