

have to keep coming back to this question of coverage with the private pension plans as a serious limitation.

A very extensive examination was done of ways to improve the Canada Pension Plan and the Quebec Pension Plan. My colleague the Hon. Member for Sudbury (Mr. Frith), when he opened the discussion on this Bill, addressed himself to that. I do hope this Government will see its way to moving on those recommendations fairly soon. They have been extensively examined and there has been very extensive consultation.

We all know that to change the Canada Pension Plan requires the agreement of two-thirds of the provinces with two-thirds of the population, but since Ministers opposite keep telling us what excellent relations they have with their provincial counterparts, let us hope there will be no problem in getting this agreement.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I welcome the initiative of the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) as far as it goes, but I do have a problem in that there is still no help for the older single person who is, in many cases, in at least as much need of assistance as the widow or widower aged between 60 and 64. I hope an amendment might be considered at the committee stage to broaden the scope of this Bill.

Mr. Keith Penner (Cochrane-Superior): Mr. Speaker, there can certainly be no forceful arguments made against a piece of legislation which is designed to extend financial benefits to some 85,000 Canadians who are in need. But I must agree with my colleague, the Hon. Member for Trinity (Miss Nicholson): it is to be regretted that another large group of Canadians also in need but who were never married, or who are divorced or separated, will be excluded from receiving these new benefits.

As all Hon. Members in this House know, there are a great many more divorced and separated people today in Canada than ever before. We also know that the unemployment rate for women who are aged 60 to 64 is particularly high even in comparison with the high national unemployment rates that we have.

It is true that all widows and widowers age 60 to 65 who are in need are now going to receive the spouse's allowance. It will cost the federal treasury for a full year of these payments some \$350 million. We already spend \$820 million in extending this program to those who are married. To include the needy among the separated and divorced would cost the Government another \$135 million. To include those persons who are in need but never married would cost the Government another \$160 million.

Obviously this new Government has recognized need, and I commend it for that. But the Government has not recognized all need. The Government has been selective. The widows and widowers who qualify must wait until next September before they receive a single payment. I am not sure what that means. Perhaps the Government is saying that hardship can be better borne during the summer months. But the widows and widowers who are eligible should not just sit around expectantly waiting for this first cheque; there is a Canadian residency

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requirement of which they should be aware. They should also be aware that they should have little or no outside income in order to qualify. The largest single cheque that will go to any one of these needy persons—the largest amount; there will be lesser amounts, of course—will be \$536 a month. It is not a handsome sum of money at all. We in Parliament should not be congratulating ourselves too much on our generosity and largesse. Of course, these payments will increase with the rising cost of living, the inflation rate, and that is to be expected.

The other point that should be remembered by widows and widowers who are eligible is that the cheque will not arrive automatically. They must apply for the money.

I have to emphasize again, Mr. Speaker, that to my mind it is just not fair to exclude needy persons on the basis of marital status. I am unable to accept that. In saying this I recognize full well, as my colleagues in the New Democratic Party will remind me and have already reminded us today, that it was the Liberal Government that began this program. I want to say that this new Government was elected on the promise of change. So far we only have promises to change and not very much in the way of definite action.

We in Canada are not doing a very good job of redistributing income. It will be recalled by some Hon. Members that the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, the OECD in Paris, gave Canada a rather poor grade for its social security program. We pride ourselves on being a very generous society, but in fact that is not so at all. We do not rate very well among most of the advanced industrialized countries. We do not target our programs at all well. The situation is not being improved by Bill C-26. We eliminate two groups of people among whom are many needy persons, people who are between the ages of 60 and 65 who are divorced or separated, the same age group as those who have never married.

This new Government has at least recognized the need for better targeting of our social benefits, but in Bill C-26 the Government does not carry out what it tells us it has recognized. The recent blue paper on social policy was no better. Imagine additional hundreds of millions of dollars under one of those options flowing into the coffers of the provincial Treasuries. We know how tight-fisted provincial Treasuries are about their welfare dollars. It would be shocking if some of the case histories were known in this house based on the administration of provincial welfare programs. They are going to flow hundreds of millions of dollars back to the provinces under one of the options. What will the needy families, those in genuine, real, desperate need get? They will get 48 cents a day.

● (1530)

Women between the ages of 60 and 65 who have never married or who are divorced may be just as much in need as those who are married or widowed. There is a very large number of single elderly women in this country who are poverty-stricken. There is a very high incidence among these