

Canada Pension Plan

In order to obtain the greatest possible benefit from the Canada Pension Plan fund a province must have made the maximum possible contribution to it. It is all very well for the Mennonite and Hutterite people to say they do not require social security and that the precepts of their religion and way of life allow them to look after their own and themselves in their old age. I have a great deal of respect for those tenets. Indeed, I believe it is very unfortunate that more people who live in this country do not follow the same principles they happen to teach and practice in their way of life.

The fact remains, however, that the Canada Pension Plan contributions are really a form of taxation. The proceeds from those payments go to the provincial and municipal governments to use for the good of all people living in the jurisdictions of those municipalities and provinces. If large groups of the Canadian population are to be exempt from contributing to the plan, that money will not be available to make up provinces' credit which can be drawn upon for works within their jurisdiction.

If it is necessary that these works be carried out, the money must be found somewhere else, either through direct taxation or by borrowing in different markets at higher interest rates, resulting in higher costs to the remaining population in a given jurisdiction, whether it be municipal or provincial. I think in proposing this legislation the government has not taken into account the result that would flow from it.

The Hutterian Brethren and the Mennonite people I believe have always suggested that they should pay their share of taxes. I know the Mennonites at least have always done that. I have been honoured to represent a number of them in my constituency. As a group they are among the finest people one could expect. They are very happy and productive people. They are not in any way a drain on society. They have certainly made no complaint about payment of taxes.

So far as the Hutterian Brethren are concerned, the same cannot be said. It is true that in their religion today they follow the maxim: Render unto Caesar that which belongs to Caesar. They have never made any complaint about paying their proper land or municipal taxes, although there has been some difficulty in respect of income taxes.

Within the last four or five years there was a dispute between the Department of National Revenue and various members of the Hutterite Brethren in Alberta with regard to their liability to pay income taxes. That has been resolved for the time being and these people are now paying taxes. The fact remains, however, that if the proposed amendment is carried, the Mennonites and Hutterian Brethren will not be contributing to the general welfare of Canada in the way I believe the majority of the people of Canada expect them to.

I think it is important to note for other members in this House that not every part of Canada is affected by this bill. Perhaps the reason I am somewhat concerned about this legislation is that a great number of Mennonites and an even greater concentration of Hutterites are located within the province of Alberta. I know there are settlements of Mennonites in Ontario and in all parts of western Canada, but there is a great concentration in Alberta. If

[Mr. Schumacher.]

these people are exempt from the making of contributions to the Canada Pension Plan, then the province of Alberta will be able to draw less money from the fund of the Canada Pension Plan for provincial or municipal purposes at a low rate of interest.

I really do not think there is real justification for allowing passage of this bill, though I know there will be at least one other speaker from this part of the House who will disagree with me. He nods his head in the affirmative. But the fact is this is a bill of general application. I do not think it is like many others in respect of which it would be possible to opt out on the basis of conscientious objection. There has been nothing from the other side, from the proponents of the bill, that would lead us to believe that.

Perhaps my hon. friend who will be speaking after me will be able to explain why the consciences of these people should be so offended with regard to paying for the support of a general social security plan. It certainly has not been explained to me why they should receive the benefits they are. If I might go back for a minute, while there have been income tax difficulties between the Hutterian Brethren and the Department of National Revenue—and so far the position of the Hutterian Brothers has not been accepted—I suggest there is still a feeling among many people in western Canada, at least in Alberta, that the Hutterian Brethren do not pay their fair share of income taxes as a result of the way they are treated by the Department of National Revenue.

● (1530)

I suggest that now is not the correct time to try to assist these people and to try to relieve them from what in fact is a form of taxation. I look forward with interest to hearing the remarks of my colleague from south western Ontario who, I believe, will be speaking next on this measure.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): The hon. member for Peel South.

Mr. Perrin Beatty (Wellington-Grey-Dufferin-Waterloo): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour for me to be mistaken for my deskmate, the hon. member for Peel South (Mr. Blenkarn), but I do not think he would be flattered. It is a great pleasure for me to be able to speak in the debate on this subject because it is a matter of great concern to me. As the hon. member who spoke before me indicated, my constituency has perhaps a greater proportion of people who will be affected by this bill than any other constituency in Canada. This is a matter that is personal to me because it affects my constituents and their right to freedom of religion as well as their rights as Canadians. This is something that has been promised to them for a long time and something which they deserve. It is a matter of giving them the justice for which they have been asking.

It is with a great deal of pride that I joined my party after passage of the Bill of Rights which was brought in by a former prime minister, the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker). One of the provisions of the Bill of Rights was that there be enshrined for Canadians the right of freedom of religion. Surely nothing could be more important for any of us than the right to freedom of religion. This is why this bill is a good bill and deserves our support.