

Oral Questions

Mr. Lalonde: As far as the percentages are concerned, my friend knows very well that the figures he mentioned do not reflect what is happening at the present time; the relationship is more like 55 per cent.

As to the last point raised by my friend, I want to remind him that I have consulted with the producers of heavy oil in the west, particularly people in Husky Oil, and their view is that the market is going to firm up. It is quite encouraging to them that we have reduced the levy on heavy oil, and this will allow them to gain a substantial part of the market which they were serving.

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IMMIGRATION**IMMIGRANT STATUS FOR VICTIMS OF ITALIAN EARTHQUAKE**

Mr. Roland de Corneille (Eglinton-Lawrence): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Employment and Immigration. At this moment of grief and concern for so many people, not only abroad but also in this country, I wish to inquire into recent press reports that the government is prepared to facilitate the access to Canada as landed immigrants of those Italians tragically victimized by the current earthquake disaster, people who, because of tragedy, are literally refugees in their own country. I presume this is a question which is of concern to all of us in this House.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, what we can do most importantly in the aftermath on this disaster is, first, to assist Canadians to make contact with any relatives they may have in the affected areas. I will be instructing my regional officials to meet with Italian organizations across Canada so that we can use our communications system and immigration offices in Italy to trace relatives so that news about their whereabouts and well-being can be obtained.

Second, we have instructed our embassy in Rome to provide for the immediate processing of all applications for immigrant status of those who are in the affected provinces. We have been working with the Department of National Health and Welfare and the RCMP to waive requirements for the normal medical and security checks which can then be conducted in Canada.

Third, we have provided for means whereby those who are homeless or left affected can be given visas into Canada on a temporary basis, provided that their relatives here will give them assistance when they arrive, and we will take their word on trust.

Those are the immediate measures we have implemented. We assume after contact with the Italian government and with Italian organizations here that if there are other ways we can provide assistance, we will be more than happy to do so.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

CANADA PENSION PLAN**VOLUNTARY PAYMENTS BY WOMEN—GOVERNMENT POSITION**

Mrs. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): Madam Speaker, our party would also strongly support the last question and answer.

My question is for the Minister of National Health and Welfare. It concerns pay and pensions for homemakers. Although our party has long advocated universal Canada Pension Plan coverage for all housewives, we are concerned that the minister's recent proposal for voluntary payments into the pension plan further discriminates against poor women. Will the minister explain whether women raising children on welfare will receive increases so as to be able to pay into the Canada Pension Plan, as she has proposed? Second, how can low-income earners, who cannot find the money for groceries, pay premiums for spouses? Third, why can we not have a system which treats these women as first-class citizens with a right to Canada pension at age 65 rather than welfare?

Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Madam Speaker, if we can reach a consensus that opening up the Canada Pension Plan is a good thing, the proposal is to allow those people who can and want to contribute to do so. I acknowledge the problem of women in the lower economic groups who will not have enough money to contribute to the pension plan which is built on employer-employee contributions. I will continue to put forward the proposal that it is valid to address the problem of women and pensions by the nature of the programs existing in Canada, improving each of them to encompass women. Generally speaking, the Canada Pension Plan applies to the average Canadian worker. If we can reach an agreement, we will open it up to those housewives who want to contribute to it. That will be one avenue which will permit many more women, although not all, to build a pension in their own name.

● (1500)

With regard to the problem of mothers on welfare referred to by the hon. member, we intend to look after them through the GIS. This will, we hope, give those who live alone, many of them women, the full amount to take them above the poverty line. That is another program, another fight, which we are carrying on at the same time.

Mrs. Mitchell: Madam Speaker, my question is for the same minister who seems to condone inequity in a program which really discriminates against low-income women. Given the fact that the minister proposes in this plan to treat housewives as self-employed persons, yet over four million Canadian women, and some men also, who work long hours in their important jobs of rearing children, receive no pay, no benefits, and could not pay premiums under this scheme, will the minister consider a "pay for homemakers" allowance, with a tax back provision for higher income families, to recognize the important job of homemaking as essential, to include low-income women and, in fact, allow all women to become