

Oral Questions

discussions with representatives of the European Union and, in particular, with Spain.

It is clear that our ambassador to Spain, our ambassador to the European Union and officials of my department here in Ottawa have contacted the ambassadors of the countries in the European Union to explain our position, to state quite clearly that it is our goal to conserve fish stocks and to reach an amicable agreement as soon as possible.

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OLD AGE PENSIONS

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when he tabled his budget, the Minister of Finance announced that he would release later this year an old age pension reform proposal. In fact, if we follow the minister's logic, his goal of a sustainable old age pension system can only lead to a reduction in the benefits paid under the current system.

Does the Minister of Finance admit that his old age pension reform proposal, under the pretext of putting in place a sustainable system, is aimed at depriving thousands of seniors of benefits?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.): Not at all, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Finance admit that his old age pension reform proposal is aimed at making seniors poorer and replacing the current pension system with a social assistance program for seniors? Will he tell us the truth?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.): Not at all, Mr. Speaker. The reason why the Minister of Human Resources Development and I intend to release these documents is precisely to avoid the catastrophe the hon. member has just described.

[English]

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pursue the issue of pensions because last year the Liberal government promised that a white paper on aging would be presented to the House before last month's budget. However, like so many of the government's policy initiatives, Canadians are still waiting for the white paper. The promise has been broken.

My question is for the Prime Minister. When can Canadians expect to see this long awaited paper on aging? Will it be tabled before the government embarks on any changes to the CPP or to OAS?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there will be a paper on aging. The Minister of Human Resources Development is working on it. It is very much in line with the reform of social programs.

We said that we have to enter into negotiations with the provinces. There will be discussions with members of the House. There will be committees and eventually resolution of the problem by the House.

I can assure everybody that our goal is to make sure we maintain a very good social security system for retired people in Canada.

• (1425)

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is really no secret that the current Canada pension plan is in big trouble. The Minister of Finance stated that unless premiums are radically increased public pensions will not survive to the 21st century.

It is also no secret that when the government wants to act it can. Look how the Liberals acted to protect their own lavish pensions, for example.

My supplementary question is for the Prime Minister. What changes does the government have planned for CPP? Is it higher premiums, increasing the retirement age, or both? Canadians deserve an answer.

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as usual Canadian people will have their answers after we have had public discussions with them and with members of the House.

I hope members of the Reform Party will have good ideas about it, but I do not think they will get them from Mr. Gingrich in Washington.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the delays are disconcerting. We were promised studies but nothing is happening. Canadians do not think the government will be able to provide adequately for their future. They want the government to give them the tools to care for themselves.

Before the ink was even dry on the last budget the government is again floating the idea of taxing RRSPs. Canadians are worried and confused about how they should provide for their retirement security.

Simply, will the government consider replacing CPP with an RRSP style program that gives Canadians more control over their economic future?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I see the problem of the Reform Party. It is trying to build up some straw bonhomme, as we say in English, to shoot at.

Our social programs will be reviewed thoroughly with the participation of all members of the House of Commons. Unfor-