

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

people. The Mennonite people have a very special outlook.

There being a power failure in the chamber:

Mr. Munro: You see what happens, Max?

Mr. Saltsman: That is what happens when one talks about religion, Mr. Speaker. I hope I receive a very satisfactory answer from the minister tonight in view of the difficulties we are encountering with this adjournment debate. The Old Order of Mennonites religion specifically binds them to help one another. Participation in an insurance program would constitute a violation of their belief. They are different from other people in this respect; they repudiate all forms of insurance whether they be private or public. I know that some people would like to get out of the Canada Pension Plan because they can make more suitable insurance arrangements privately. But this is not the case with the Old Order of Mennonites. As far as their history goes back they have refused to participate in insurance programs because they share their obligations. Their feeling is that if they participate in an insurance program it would in some way infringe upon that aspect of their religion.

As an indication that they are not trying to save money, they have stated they are prepared to give up the benefits of the Canada Pension Plan and to pay into a separate fund the payments they would make in respect of the Canada Pension Plan. On the surface this seems to be a very logical approach to the whole subject. It is not for me to judge whether they—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bécharde): Order, please. The Minister of National Health and Welfare.

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Thank you for your indulgence, Mr. Speaker. I apologize to the hon. member for Waterloo (Mr. Saltsman) for my late arrival to answer this question. We are very aware of the problem raised by the hon. member with regard to the Mennonites. The hon. member for Kitchener (Mr. Hymmen)

has on several occasions also raised the problem with the government.

The question of exemption from Canada Pension Plan payments by old order Amish and Mennonite communities raises, as I am sure the hon. member is aware, many unique problems with respect to precedent, universality, portability and the handling of survivor benefits for former members of these orders. If they were exempted, it would create a good deal of difficulty in terms of their re-entry into the Canada Pension Plan. In spite of these problems, and as a result of representations that I and others have received, it has been decided, in co-operation with my colleague the Minister of National Revenue (Mr. Côté), that we bring before the government a case for exemption. We will ask that the government make a decision in this respect. If there should be an initial, favourable decision in this case that an exemption is warranted—and I am sure the hon. member is aware of the dangers in making exemptions to the Canada Pension Plan—it will be necessary before any final decision is made to obtain a similar reaction, namely in favour of exemption, from the provinces who are, in a loose sense, partners with us in the Canada Pension Plan.

● (10:20 p.m.)

I do realize that there may be exceptional circumstances so far as the Mennonites are concerned and that if we do rule in their favour it would not necessarily set a precedent which would start a whole raft of applications for exemptions. We could not very well rule in favour of such exemptions without prejudicing the whole concept of the plan itself. So, with those few remarks, I should like the hon. member to know that we are seriously considering this matter and, subject to the case being reviewed favourably by the government and particularly by the Minister of National Revenue (Mr. Côté), we would be prepared to take it up with the provinces.

Motion agreed to and the house adjourned at 10.25 p.m.