

Canada Pension Plan

have a long way to go. I urge that this parliament get on with the job.

Mr. S. Victor Raiton (Welland): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you very much for this opportunity to join in the debate. We have had a very eloquent and clear exposition by the minister who went into the broad aspects and details, and this is a grand bill. We had the short and excellent presentation of the hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie) and this final, shall we say, almost peroration by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). I think the minister will be glad to have had his agenda looked after by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre for the next two to five years.

We all have to have something to say, even though it might be trite when following the previous speakers. I should like to remind the House that this bill is really an act to amend the Canada Pension Plan, and it continues the government's policy to bring in legislation which aims to improve the lot of the old people and which will really equalize benefits in our society. It now includes women generally but, as has been said by other speakers, we hope it will eventually include the non-paid housewife or, in some cases, the non-paid house spouse.

The bill includes the provisions of Bill C-190 which died prematurely when parliament rose last summer, but which was an acceptable interim development in the evolution of the Canada Pension Plan. The bill also provides more changes of a technical nature. These have been well discussed and are evidence of needed change, and they will prevent inconveniences or even unfairness to the pensioner.

Before dealing with explicit changes I should like to remind the House that the government believes in federal-provincial conferences—in other words, communication. These are becoming more frequent and more successful. It is really a "must" in order fully to integrate regions with the central parliament. In fact it is to be hoped that in time the misunderstanding and hostility of areas, provinces or regions, either among themselves or directed toward the federal government, will greatly lessen as communication becomes more effective. I say that without being partisan.

● (2140)

Be that as it may, the Edmonton meeting of February 19 and 20 this year was most satisfactory. The health and welfare ministers wished to continue to emphasize the review of social security which had been begun in the previous year. They all agreed that we should assist the poor and disadvantaged, including the unemployed and the underpaid. They reaffirmed their agreed-on principle to help people provide for their retirement, for sickness, accident and unemployment. Of course, they included income support, where required. Because a guaranteed annual income or an omnibus program to replace all existing programs did not appear desirable at once, and there are many reasons for this, they delegated their officials to continue discussing this matter; but they themselves proceeded to the practical questions of the Canada and Quebec Pension Plans.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

One of the priority issues was equal treatment of male and female contributors, and the other concerned how a housewife or spouse remaining at home could contribute to these plans. The present bill has actually been based on the amendments which this meeting at Edmonton thought necessary. So, we already have, as it were, a national consensus on its provisions.

Some worry was expressed today about our ability to pay for these plans. Speaking on the bill previously before the House, the hon. member for Dauphin (Mr. Ritchie), whom I respect, was worried in case the Old Age Security and Canada Pension Plan would tend to reduce the need for savings. Such a suggestion is not really correct. I think it has been demonstrated that there was greater saving per capita from income in the last year or so than at any other time in our history.

Some members are also worried in case this bill will add to inflationary pressures. I think inflation is with us, and must be faced and accepted. We should realize that Canada cannot take a stance alone. The only stance that we would take should be one that recognizes that Canada is in one of the best positions among the countries of the world, can afford such plans, and should undertake them. I agree with the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre in what he said about equality. There is no equality when some people can hardly get along on what they have while others have immense wealth. I think there must be some kind of income redistribution, and the Canada Pension Plan helps in this.

To make members happier let me refer them to a recent edition of the *Wall Street Journal*. We should all read it. It forecasts that Canada's future, despite inflation, will probably be that of leader of all developed countries. We are almost in that position now. We will be there 30 years from now. I believe that we can well afford any plan we can bring in to equalize incomes, particularly of the aged, and to make more equal the status of women in our society.

The status of women generally, their acceptance in the labour force, and the need for equality of treatment for women in the matter of pensions and legal rights: are things that have all received a great deal of public attention. Separated or divorced women, and children of failed marriages all require new provisions in our system of justice. This bill, in so far as it is now possible for us to move in this direction, faces up to these problems. It is axiomatic that we, as a parliament, will have to update constantly our legislation as society continues to evolve.

As we become aware of new attitudes to the position of women in society and in the home, we must adjust our pension schemes accordingly. We now question any different treatment of women as contributors to and beneficiaries of the Canada Pension Plan. In addition, we wonder why housewives at home cannot participate. The first concern is being looked after in this legislation, Bill C-19, the second issue will continue to be studied, because implementing it is difficult and complex. These things must be discussed by the public at large as well as by governments.

Originally, the Canada Pension plan was conceived as being part of the income maintenance system and as involving both public and private sectors. Early on most