

Government Orders

• (1650)

I ask myself and this House, are we going to have a better program for the people who are out there or are we going to have a program which fails them as the years unfold?

It is said in order to avoid passing on current debts to future generations of Canadians we must increase payments today. The failure to provide funding today, keeping in mind that today refers to a day, this day, still in recession, means that a lot of jobs are still being lost. It means retraining those workers who are now out of the work force. Today also reminds us of those people being laid off at ages 50 and 55.

Let us be honest here. These people cannot go back and be retrained. They are not going to be able to contribute to this Canada Pension Plan any further. As we look at the acts that have been talked about and dealt with, Canada Pension Plan, the Family Allowances Act and the Old Age Security Act, we can see that these are three very important pieces of legislation which have been at the centre of our social safety net for years.

As tough times come in their days, we promised to always look after our younger people, our older people and our disabled people. I want to, as I did some time here before, quote a statement made by the late great Senator Hubert H. Humphrey: "The moral test of government is how it treats those who are in the dawn of their life, the children, those who are in the twilight of their life, the aged, and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped".

I think this is what we need to look at today as we prepare to make amendments to this bill. Are we adequately preparing ourselves as members of Parliament and contributors? Are we as the custodians of this pension fund looking after the interests of the men and women of our society or are we looking for another way, a cheap way, to take another tax grab from the public? If this is another tax grab, then it is wrong.

I believe fully and wholeheartedly and have supported unconditionally anything that will increase the pensions and the benefits of Canadians. I believe that this Canada Pension Plan is one of the greatest pieces of legislation ever introduced in this country. I wonder if we are doing

the right thing. Are we sincere? Are we really going to make this a better plan? Are we committed to it in this House?

It is a contributory plan, contributed to by the employer, the employee, by self-employed people and by the interest that it earns itself over the years. I believe as we look at the pension plan this is the only pension plan that a lot of Canadians have or will ever have. They are not fortunate enough to work at a company or be in government where they can contribute to another private plan or government run plan. They must look in their later years to have this and hopefully still have the old age pension plan to go along with it.

I really wonder as I take part in this debate and listen to all of the debates across the floor here today and yesterday if we are doing all we can as legislators. Are we making sure that this pension plan is going to be there for the people growing up, for the people who have not yet entered the work force?

I believe we owe it to Canadians to make this a plan that is the envy of the world. I would hate to be one who would take part in making it lesser than that.

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre): Mr. Speaker, I would like to compliment my colleague from Prince Edward Island on a very excellent presentation.

As we discuss Bill C-39 today, an act to amend the Canada Pension Plan, the Family Allowance Act and the Old Age Security Act, my colleague spoke fairly eloquently about certain aspects of the bill. However, I would like to ask him if he could elaborate a little on some of the cases in his riding and some of the difficulties people in his riding might have had in trying to get their pensions and trying to make ends meet.

According to some of the reports such as the one prepared by the National Council on Welfare, it seems that a senior citizen, for example, who is to receive the maximum CPP and the maximum Old Age Security pension as well as the Guaranteed Income Supplement, according to 1989 statistics, would end up receiving approximately \$12,217 which, for a city such as ours here in Ottawa, is at most about \$200 above the poverty line. In a city such as mine, Ottawa, the maximum a senior is receiving is just about at the edge of the poverty line.