

works. Meanwhile, the private sector is crying for money. Those are matters we will have to consider extremely carefully. I think the parliamentary secretary was ill-advised to mention the province of Ontario without spelling out why that province wants to think about this matter. I thought I should put that on the record so the parliamentary secretary would know that he cannot get away with murder in this House. I see him smiling over there, so I know I am right.

The Postmaster General (Mr. Blais) intervened a moment ago. All I can tell him is that mail between Toronto and Hamilton takes seven days. We expect him to do a much better job than he is doing now. Mail takes five or six days between Toronto and Ottawa. No matter how much the minister praises the efficiency of the Post Office, constituents—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Order, please. I suggest that the hon. member should get back to the bill under discussion, Bill C-49.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Alexander: Well, I think my point is well taken. The Postmaster General will think twice before he moves in again.

The question of including housewives—and that is what this bill is all about, notwithstanding that it uses the word “spouse”—in the Canada Pension Plan was considered last year during meetings of the federal minister and provincial welfare ministers. The intent was to give recognition to work in the home and to provide a measure of financial security and independence to a spouse who works at home. Two approaches were discussed. It was proposed that pension credits earned by spouses during marriage be divided equally between spouses, upon marriage dissolution, which is to be limited to legal marriages terminated by divorce or annulment. In future they would be given some entitlement in terms of equity as a result of their playing a meaningful role in the home. This is in keeping with the belief that both spouses have an equal right to the security being built up by either of them for the future, since each contributes equally but differently.

● (1550)

Another proposal considered by the ministers would permit those contributors who leave the labour force to raise children to drop months of low or zero earnings from the calculation of their average lifetime earnings for benefit purposes. This hopes to ensure that the parent who remains at home to raise children is not penalized for the period of low or no earnings in the calculation of pension benefits, and protects the pension credit earned before or after the period devoted to children.

The drop-out provision would apply to periods of time spent at home with children under seven years of age. The parent would have greater labour market flexibility after the children entered school. This proposal attempts to give economic recognition to work at home and partial recognition to the disadvantages women traditionally experience in the labour market.

Canada Pension Plan

There are problems, however, with respect to the drop-out provision, which I will dwell on at some length shortly.

Bill C-49 brings these two proposals which were discussed by the federal and provincial ministers of health into focus through major amendments to the Canada Pension Plan. In addition, the bill includes a number of housekeeping amendments. The most important of these would allow up to one year's retroactive payment of retirement benefits to contributors between 65 and 70 years of age and who file late applications for benefits. At the present time, retirement benefits can only be paid after age 70.

There are other important amendments which the parliamentary secretary has mentioned that are more or less in the housekeeping area. One is the provision for benefit application to be made on the behalf of a deceased person or persons. This is certainly a step in the right direction. We have no quarrel, either, with equalization of children's benefits in respect of all children, regardless of family size. We want to look very carefully at the payment of a per diem allowance to members of the Canada Pension Plan advisory committee. We want to know why, and how much. When you start playing around with the public purse with respect to advisory committees, it is important to know why, and how much is involved.

There is an extension of the authority to enter into international social security agreements. As you know, Mr. Speaker, this amendment is necessary because we have just brought in amendments to the Old Age Security Act which determine new residency requirements. Just as important, the bill gave authority to enter into reciprocal agreements regarding portability of pensions between Great Britain and Canada, the United States and Canada, France and Canada, portions of the Third World, and so forth. Of course, the minister has been on a trip to explore the possibility of these agreements coming into full force. I understand hundreds of thousands of people are waiting for these agreements and for proclamation of the bill dealing with new residency requirements and reciprocal agreements. I understand the minister wants this amendment to come into force by July 1, and hopes by that time he will have reciprocal agreements ready to be executed by Canada and the countries involved.

Notwithstanding the good intentions there may be regarding the splitting of Canada Pension Plan credits upon marriage breakdown, there are, of course, other implications and problems which will have to be worked out. We intend to pursue this question to make sure we are moving in the right direction. In a case where one partner has been receiving a CPP, disability or retirement pension, the retroactive splitting upon breakdown will alter the calculation of the recipient's benefit—to their disadvantage. Splitting upon breakdown may come into conflict with the provision that a person cannot be both a recipient and a contributor to a retirement or disability fund at the same time. This matter will require review in so far as it affects disability pensions and the definition of “disability” under the plan.

For low income families, retroactive splitting upon breakdown may result in loss of coverage that has been paid for,