

● (1520)

Mr. Bill Jarvis (Perth-Wilmot): Mr. Speaker, I rise to support this bill and I believe I can be brief. My personal concern with the exemption provisions of the Canada Pension Plan arises out of the fact that I have a number of Old Order Mennonite and Amish in my riding. The position that I take is to try to reflect, as best as I am able, the feeling in the hearts and consciences of these people. I believe, Sir, that this feeling was best expressed in a short sentence in a letter from a member of the Old Order of Mennonites which read as follows:

We believe in trying to live by the honest labour of our own hands and not accept handouts from the public treasury.

I find a great deal to support in that position, and frankly I find very little to criticize or question. I suppose one could argue that this violates the principle of universality in the pension scheme, and indeed it does. I do know the advantages of the universal welfare and insurance schemes, but I am not prepared to accept the principle of universality as the single criterion upon which legislation should be based. From time to time, and probably on too rare occasions, we in this House have the opportunity of expressing that which is in the hearts and consciences of one of our minority groups. We have the privilege in certain cases of overriding part of a universal scheme which is supported only by technicalities and bureaucratic expediency. I suggest to Your Honour that Bill C-190 affords us such an opportunity.

This bill does not open any great floodgates to Canadians wishing to escape the obligations of the Canada Pension Plan. It permits a few very small groups to escape a burden that is placed on their consciences. It will not destroy the Canada Pension Plan. It will not create a bureaucratic nightmare. I must reject immediately the argument that this infringes upon the fair financing of the Canada Pension Plan. If one wishes to reduce this debate to a matter of debits and credits, I think we will find that the Old Order of Mennonites and the Amish are certainly not the winners, and that the public treasury is certainly not the loser.

My position on this matter of finances can be supported at every level of government, not just the federal level. At the municipal level these people pay substantial realty taxes, a large portion of which goes to education and welfare costs, yet their children are educated in their own parochial schools entirely at their own expense, and these people do not accept welfare.

At the provincial and federal levels of government I point out that these people contribute to such plans as workmen's compensation, family assistance plans, old age pensions, and yet they accept no benefits from any such plan. As an aside I would point out that it is a matter of record that these people have repeatedly offered to pay the equivalent of insurance premiums into any worthy charity. Therefore if one wishes to argue on the basis of economics, certainly the public treasury comes out far ahead of the Old Order of Mennonites and the Amish.

In this connection may I emphasize one very important point. Contributions by way of taxation do not place the same burden upon the consciences of these people. They contribute substantially, and indeed willingly, although

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they accept no benefits. However, a contribution by way of an insurance premium, such as under the Canada Pension Plan, is a philosophical burden. It violates their principle of mutual aid. It means that they are being compelled to support a government welfare program as against a church centred program, which naturally arouses a fear that over a period of time the loyalties of their people could be diverted away from the church toward a dependence on government. I believe it behooves us to respect this principle of mutual aid where, for example, buildings destroyed by fire are replaced by willing neighbours, and where plowing, seeding and harvesting of crops are performed for those who are the victims of illness or accident.

Therefore I support this bill, but in doing so I remind the minister that this legislation was promised two years ago by the then minister of national health and welfare and the then minister of national revenue. The timing of this legislation is a pretty good indication of what we have come to expect from those who choose to govern by press release. I confess that I doubt that we would even have this legislation now had it not been for the minority position of the government resulting from the election last October. Nor do I suggest that the government or the minister should take any pride in the fact that Canada Pension Plan premiums were collected from the Old Order of Mennonites and the Amish by way of garnishee of milk, cream and grain cheques.

As pointed out earlier in this debate by the hon. member for Wellington-Grey-Dufferin-Waterloo (Mr. Beatty), we in this House often find ourselves in the uncomfortable position of sitting in judgment to some degree on our fellow countrymen. We have judged that those who contribute to government welfare schemes and collect benefits in return are good citizens. Who among us is to say that those for whom I speak today, who contribute equally but take nothing in return, are not good Canadians?

In closing may I quote briefly from an editorial which appeared in the June 14, 1973, edition of *Mount Forest Confederate*:

So determined was the government to tell Canadians how they should save for their old age that they deducted premiums from Mennonite farmers' cream cheques. Henceforward the Mennonites will be permitted to provide for their sunset years by personal frugality and the raising of devoted families—as they have been doing quite successfully for the past 300 years. In fact it would be just about ideal if the government could find a workable law which would make all the rest of us do the same thing.

Mr. Speaker: If the minister speaks now he will close the debate.

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I wish to take only a few minutes to put on the record certain comments concerning the scope of the bill and of the various clauses contained therein. I have listened with great interest to the points of view expressed by hon. members on both sides of the House. I note that the debate concentrated mainly on the clause that has raised most questions, and on which we heard two speeches this afternoon. But, Mr. Speaker, the bill has other provisions in it, and I thought it might save time in the standing committee if I took a few minutes to say a few words about the bill in general.