

*Adjournment Debate*

I find it difficult to understand the logic of the Department in this regard. I wrote to the Hon. Minister. Indeed, I have high regard for the Minister of National Health and Welfare who has brought forward a number of outstanding initiatives, including, I might add, some very worth-while changes to the very Canada Pension Plan we are talking about.

Nonetheless, the Minister corresponded with me in regard to Mrs. Sinclair's case and indicated that it was unfortunate that she did not apply for disability benefits at the time when she met the contributory requirements. He indicates he is afraid that he can but confirm the decision of his officials that she does not now meet them. He says that the legislation is specific in this regard and he is permitted no discretionary powers whereby these minimum requirements may be waived, regardless of any personal sympathy he might feel for a particular individual's situation.

● (1815)

It seems to me, again with all due respect, that this answer just does not suit the requirements of the situation. I say with respect that it is simply insufficient and inadequate. I urge the Department to bring forward some amendments to the legislation to enable deserving and needy individuals such as Mrs. Sinclair to apply retroactively.

In conclusion, it is certainly my intention to bring forward a Private Member's Bill in this regard, and I will be seeking agreement to its speedy passage by all concerned.

**Mr. Murray Cardiff (Parliamentary Secretary to Solicitor General of Canada):** Madam Speaker, the issue raised by the Hon. Member for Swift Current—Maple Creek (Mr. Wilson) is certainly serious, but let me begin by explaining that in order to qualify for disability benefits payable under the Canada Pension Plan a contributor must have made contributions to the plan in two of the last three years or in five of the last ten years. Those rules came into place in January, 1987, replacing rules which require contributions in five of the last ten years and one-third of all contributory years.

It should be remembered as well that the years spent raising young children up to age seven can be dropped to help meet

the requirements. With retroactivity provisions, it is possible to qualify for benefits in some cases on an application made more than six years after leaving the paid labour force. Nevertheless, a number of contributors failed to qualify for CPP disability benefits because their application was just too late.

The existence of a test of recent contributions reflects an intent to provide benefits only where there is, in some sense, a loss of earnings due to disability. The test was also considered reasonable, given the generous disability benefits provided by the plan relative to the contributions paid.

As I mentioned earlier, the 1987 amendments to the plan make it easier to meet the contributory requirements. This important change did not of course receive as much attention as the increase in the flat rate portion of CPP disability benefits. These were raised by about \$150 per month in recognition of the income situation of one of society's most vulnerable groups.

The Minister has asked his officials to examine the possibility of some further extension of the contributory rules. However, what is being suggested by the Hon. Member would require a further Act of Parliament and provincial approval. It would therefore be misleading to promise that any action would take place at an early date.

Another way of attacking the problem of late applications is raising public awareness of this issue. In addition to the communications activities surrounding the introduction of new CPP legislation in 1987, continuing efforts are being concentrated on the disabled. The Department is also investigating ways to reach potential beneficiaries and to improve the knowledge and understanding of Canadians in general regarding CPP disability benefits.

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne):** The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at two o'clock, pursuant to Standing Order 3(1).

The House adjourned at 6.19 p.m.