

*Old Age Security*

differences begin to build up between women. Some receive a certain amount of money under one program and some another amount of money under a different program, and others still receive nothing because they come under no program. I feel that social legislation should be enacted by the governments of the day, nationally by the federal government and, to the extent they can, by provincial governments. This would allow all women to come within a similar category for similar benefits. This is my view. I object to including maternity benefits in a negotiation package for just one small group. I believe in maternity benefits. As a matter of fact, I was part of the legislation in Alberta which led the way with regard to maternity benefits several years ago. I believe that course was followed by other governments later. The fact that babies were to be born in hospitals and not in some other places saved the lives of hundreds of babies born during the depression years.

Something else which always appalls me about social legislation, and which causes me great difficulty when explaining it to the people who come to me, is where there are differences between two women on one street, for example. Both are widows; one is 62 years of age and the other is 64. Neither one's spouse came under the old age pension but the spouse of one had contributed to the Canada Pension Plan and the spouse of the other had not, for the simple reason that he was not working during the period of 1976, or because he was working in a field in which that pension was not deducted. Both these women came to see me at the same time. They told me they had come to me to see whether they could receive the Canada pension. I asked them if their husbands had contributed to the plan. As I said before, one husband had and the other had not. Neither of the two women had contributed since they were housewives. I was able to tell one of the ladies that she qualified for a certain amount of Canada pension and that I would be glad to fill in the application for her. I told the other lady that it was no use because she had never contributed. She said that she had no opportunity to contribute, nor had her husband. I recognize that, but they receive no Canada pension.

This type of social legislation where we make differences of flesh of one and fish of another does not lead to a good feeling among our people. In my view, our social legislation should be overhauled with a view to giving the benefits to all those who fall within that group.

I recall that when I was first campaigning for the House of Commons in 1979 I knocked at a door in a small town. When the lady came to the door, I introduced myself. She said that she wanted to talk to me, and also to every other candidate, but so far I was the only one who had knocked at her door. She said she wanted to contribute to the Canada pension and that she was a housewife. I do not believe she had a husband, I guess she was a single woman. I did not go into all the details of her life. She said that she was able to contribute and that she should have the right to contribute. I rather agree with that. The women who are spending their lives in the kitchen and who are raising children, who are doing one of the most important jobs in the nation, should have the right to contrib-

ute to the Canada Pension Plan. If that legislation were so amended that would be fine.

● (1650)

There is still another group, however, those who will not be able to contribute. When people get to the age where they need help, are we going to treat them on the basis of whether they did or did not contribute to the plan? I think that is an important point. People of an advanced age who need help should get it, and that is where I differ somewhat, not too much, from the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre on the matter of universality.

I know people who are aged 66, 70 or 75 today who are well off and are drawing the old age pension. They have plenty to get by on and do not need it but as there is universality, they are entitled to it under the law. Personally, I question that.

Universality sounds fine and at one time I advocated it but when we see what social legislation is costing the nation, and when we consider that many people get nothing, then I think we have to reassess the situation. We must ask if those who are well off and have made provision for their senior years and are not going to suffer in any way, should draw this allowance while other people in the age bracket who need it badly, get nothing.

I think of single women between the ages of 60 and 65. If a woman's husband was a pensioner and she was on spouse's allowance, she is fortunate, because the legislation that the Clark government introduced to continue that pension for the spouse filled one gap. A lot of women did not have a husband who was a pensioner and indeed, some did not have a husband at all. I know one woman who spent her life looking after a disabled sister. She has no way of getting help, except through welfare. An hon. member from British Columbia told us that some people who have been independent all their lives are reluctant to go to the welfare office. I think the welfare office has its place, Mr. Speaker, and I do not look down on anyone who has to go there. It is there to help people, but in spite of anything we say, many people feel that there is a disgrace in applying for welfare.

I think we made a mistake in our social legislation when we did away with the disability pension. There is a disability pension today if one has contributed to the Canada Pension Plan but a lot of people did not and are now dependent on welfare. They should be in a different category. At one time there were two disability pension plans, the federal and the provincial—at least the province of Alberta had a plan and I suppose other provinces did as well. At present the only disability pension is paid under the Canada Pension Plan. In many cases the only redress for the disabled is to seek help through welfare, and that is not satisfactory.

I think the government realizes that a lot of work has to be done on pensions. The Canada Pension Plan does not do the complete job and that is aggravated by the pension bill passed in this House last night for MPs and senators. They can now draw a full pension at age 35 if elected at age 20, based on the best six years of earning. That is pretty rich, when someone