

The Budget—Miss Bégin

14, 1980, four years ago. It says this at page 5 of *Hansard* for that year:

Work must begin immediately to design better methods of providing flexible, portable, and secure pensions both in the private and public sectors. To start this process, my Government will soon release a major study on the Canadian pension system.

That was four years ago; four years in which people have not seen that system come forward; four years in which the Minister and her colleagues promised to begin that work immediately. Why have we had to wait until this time in the life of a government to see even the most modest, as the Minister admitted, restrictive and limited measures with regard to pension reform? Why after four years of neglect is the Minister able to stand there and say this is what we are going to do? Why the four-year wait?

Miss Bégin: Mr. Speaker, the answer is extremely simple. Let me rapidly explain to the Hon. Member. There are two main reasons. First, I again assumed this portfolio on March 3, 1980 after we once more formed the Government. In March, 1981 we had the first national conference on pension reform. That was organized with all the parties, including all governments, the private sector, volunteers, seniors and the academics. That was a fantastic realization. It brought into the open the problem which experts had been studying behind the scenes.

In December, 1982 we brought forward the green paper, co-signed by the Minister of Finance and myself, launching a parliamentary task force to make a study and recommendations. The report was received just a few months ago, two months ago, I believe, and the first measure appeared in the Budget. That is the first concrete measure that will change people's lives.

There are two things the Hon. Member does not understand. I do not think there is anything wrong with my saying that there is massive private interest in that dossier, in the vicinity of \$60 billion. That is what we are talking about. I do not know if the Hon. Member, who was not long in government, knows what that means. How do you move an elephant of \$60 billion and more with private interests when we want to provide equitable coverage for everyone? That is part of the problem—it is as simple as that—with the huge lobby that ordinary Canadians workers do not easily have to counter-match.

The other problem is the recession. How can the Hon. Member ask us to jump on the pension bandwagon when Canadians need jobs first? The answer is very easy. We are working without interruption and at the same time at a wise pace doing the work to achieve pension reform and the work that is needed to pick it up faster when the recession is fully behind us.

● (1150)

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, the Minister mentioned the proposal in the Throne Speech for vesting a pension plan after two years. I assume that the Government has done actuarial studies to show the viability of that proposal and, if so, I hope

she will table them at the earliest possible time so that we can understand how sound the proposal is. Attractive as it may be, let us see how financially sound it is.

The Minister also mentioned pensions for immigrants. I take it they will be paid for out of the Consolidated Revenue Account. There is a group of immigrants who have been waiting for reform in their pension scheme under the agreement with the United Kingdom, and those Canadian citizens who have been pensioned in the U.K. but whose pensions have not kept up because of the inflationary difference between the U.K. and Canada. Those people are suffering as a result.

If it is the intention of the Government to pay pensions out of general revenue for a group of people in Canada who have not qualified previously, and since there does not seem to be the possibility for an early agreement with the United Kingdom on this matter, if the Government can do this for one group of people, why can it not update the pension agreement and pay for it out of general revenue?

Miss Bégin: Mr. Speaker, I think the Hon. Member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald) who spoke earlier should see in the comments of her colleague, the Hon. Member for Surrey-White Rock-North Delta (Mr. Friesen), exactly the kind of representation we receive on pension reform. I feel like saying to the Hon. Member, just let me ask him one question in return: Is he for or against pension reform?

When people start asking is it sound, and have we done the actuarial work, we all know what that means; it means that they do not believe in it. They want all the tables to prove that it is sound to give a pension to every Canadian worker. We are not sure that it is sound. Of course, we have a good pension. For the others, however, we are not sure it is sound because if it were sound it would have been done. With reasoning like that, 55 per cent of Canadian workers still do not have a pension.

I have not said it is an insurance, as the Hon. Member remarked. I said that we are going to open up even more tax opportunities for Canadians to pick it up. That is the last chance of the private sector to do its homework and take its responsibilities. It probably went with all the good big pension plans and made good profits. It is a business and that is fine, but it should do its job and be more inventive and show a bit of imagination for Canadians in other kinds of companies, such as small business which is the backbone of our economy.

The Hon. Member referred to pensions for immigrants but from the way he spoke I think he is not familiar with the way this works. He should know that immigrants to Canada get a pension according to the number of years they have been here, with a basic 10 years. That goes to British or any other immigrants. The only thing that will be improved is that those who would be below the poverty line because they do not have enough years will be assured of the minimum that any Canadian receives. In other words, although that has nothing to do with the British pension, it will go to British pensioners if they are very, very poor.