

Canada Pension Plan

He seemed to spend most of his time complaining that we should not proceed with this complicated bill today because we have not had time to study it. I do not claim to be as smart as the imaginary lawyer to whom he referred, but I would point out that we had a bill very much like this, Bill No. C-75, which was given first reading and presented to us on March 17. This Bill No. C-136 is based very largely on that bill. There are very few changes in the retirement benefits set out in the bill. Bill No. C-136, in the main, adds the widows, disability and survivor benefits.

I point out also that since August 10 we have had a white paper that explains the provisions of this bill. All told, I do not believe we have any complaint at being asked to proceed with it today, even if some members did not get their copies of the bill until last Thursday. Personally, I found no difficulty on Monday night, just out of my own interest, in ascertaining that there were copies of the bill, after it had been tabled, and if any member really wanted one he could get it quite easily. My concern, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Churchill: That is not the way to run a government.

Mr. Knowles: —is not so much with the fact that the government has brought on second reading, but is rather with the long delay we have had in connection with the Canada pension plan since this government first came into office, and the fact that we might yet fail to get it on the statute books at this session. I hope that is not the case but I express that fear as a way of indicating my desire that this house and the government take the steps that are necessary to complete this legislation at this session.

I believe we are all satisfied that a bill of such complexity is better studied in committee. Therefore it is not inappropriate that there has been general agreement among the parties that the debate on second reading be limited to three days. I think it is well understood also that when the bill goes to a special joint committee that committee will be granted all the time it wishes to examine and discuss it. However, I would like to suggest to the government that if the time taken by the special committee is such that we get beyond Christmas, or beyond some point at which the business of the house requires the house to continue in session, technically speaking the house be continued in session, even if it is given some kind of recess, so that the special joint committee can make its

report back after that recess to a resumed portion of this same session.

I am sure hon. members realize that if the house is prorogued while this matter is being discussed by the joint committee that would kill the bill for the session, and we would have to start all over again at the next session of the house. I remind the minister of the commitment made by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Favreau) on July 6 when he was house leader, that the government would take all the steps necessary to complete the legislative process with respect to this bill at this session. I trust that commitment will be kept.

On several occasions we have said that we welcome this bill and we have indicated the aspects of it that are good. Therefore it is hardly necessary to spend any time repeating that welcome or to go into greater detail with respect to the value of this legislation. However, I would like to say that we feel security for our people in their older years, security for our people on the advent of widowhood or disability, or on the occasion of children being orphaned, is one of the most important marks of a decent civilization.

We think the time has come to make an adequate pension plan an integral part of our economy. As I have already said to the minister, we do not regard this bill as the last word in this kind of legislation but it is certainly a forward step. We have moved from the first positions that we took in this field when we provided pensions that merely kept starving people alive. We have moved into universality with respect to pensions. We have moved into a fairly broad range of pensions, and now we are considering the proposition that one of the things that should be an integral part of our economy is a plan whereby pensions as of right are available upon retirement, are available to persons who are disabled, are available to persons who become widows, or in certain instances widowers, and are available to orphans.

A great deal has yet to be done to raise the levels provided by this bill and make them really adequate, but this bill starts in that direction and for that reason we are glad that at last we have it. Nevertheless I wish to say again that we feel this legislation is too modest in its beginnings.

I know there are those in the house who think we should be grateful for the extent to which the bill goes, but I suggest that this concept of starting things in a modest way is one that has been with us far too long. I may have occasion to quote this