

Canada Pension Plan

I should mention here that the minister has just come back from a series of discussions with his colleagues in France, the United Kingdom, the United States and Poland. France, the United Kingdom and the U.S. expressed a great deal of interest in moving ahead to finalize social security agreements with Canada on an urgent basis. Our officials will meet with representatives from the U.S. next week, with officials of the U.K. in early July, and with French officials early this fall. Also, Poland has agreed to study the possibility of a social security agreement with Canada. Our officials will also be meeting with Italian representatives in July for technical discussions on the possible features of an agreement.

In order to further enhance our ability to bargain effectively with these other countries, we are seeking a minor adjustment to the enabling provisions for CPP agreements. This amendment, which runs parallel to the recent OAS legislation which I just mentioned, would permit the conclusion of agreements in which the total amount of the combined benefit payable under an international social security agreement is limited to a specified maximum amount. However, full protection is included to guarantee that this limitation will always provide total benefits which are at least as large as the CPP benefit which would have been payable in the absence of an agreement.

Two final amendments of a minor nature are also included in this bill. One would provide regulation-making powers to permit the withholding, if necessary, of CPP benefits to help in obtaining required information from the beneficiary. It is hoped that these powers will make it possible to establish, in case of doubt, whether beneficiaries are entitled to the benefits they are receiving. Where the documentation received confirms eligibility for benefits, the benefit payments would be reinstated with full retroactivity.

The second involves compensation for members of the Canada Pension Plan advisory committee. This committee has, in the ten years it has been in existence, proved to be an invaluable source of advice, information and liaison for the minister and his predecessors as ministers responsible for the CPP. The CPP advisory committee is a group of up to 16 dedicated citizens representing employees, employers, the self-employed and the general public, who examine a wide range of topics relating to the role and operation of the Canada Pension Plan. I feel certain that this group of men and women rank amongst the most active federal advisory committees. Their thoughtful advice and timely reports have served to represent the interests of the Canadian people in the development of the CPP. Indeed, the minister has been so impressed with the quality of their advice and the importance of the issues they have addressed that over the last few years he has thought it useful to publish most of their reports in order that others might benefit from their work. The proposed amendment would permit the payment of the regular per diem allowance to members for those days which they spend on advisory committee work, in addition to time spent at the formal meetings for which they already receive some compensation. By virtue of this provision, I hope that some of the financial

[Mr. McRae.]

burden will be defrayed for members who spend so much of their valuable time and energy on the work of the committee.

In conclusion, these amendments will serve to improve the effectiveness of the CPP in its role as a provider of income security for the retired, the disabled and the families of deceased contributors. They represent a major step forward in recognizing the value and importance of work in the home.

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, I am extremely disturbed and surprised that the minister is not in attendance at the time of second reading of this extremely important bill dealing with amendments to the Canada Pension Plan. He should be here, no matter how impressed we are with the amendments and no matter how much commendation the bill deserves.

This bill attempts to give some recognition to the role of housewives, but there is another important factor. I notice that the parliamentary secretary did not take any time to indicate to this House, to the people of Canada and particularly to the people of the province of Ontario, the stand of that province with respect to this bill. The parliamentary secretary gave no indication whatsoever of the reasons behind the hesitation of the province of Ontario in giving blanket approval at this time. The parliamentary secretary neglected to say that there would be certain hardships and inequities as a result of the drop-out provisions as they affect women and that there would be subsidization by the poor in favour of the rich. He did not mention that matter, and I will get into it a little later.

Notwithstanding that, Ontario's approach is commendable. The parliamentary secretary should have at least mentioned that, and he should have mentioned the concern of the province of Ontario with respect to the whole question of the funding of pension plans. It seems to me that the parliamentary secretary was playing politics—

An hon. Member: Never.

Mr. Alexander: —with a very important piece of legislation.

An hon. Member: Oh!

Mr. Alexander: I hear an hon. member opposite who does not know what the bill is about because he has not read it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Would the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander) please address the Chair?

Mr. Alexander: I was speaking through you, sir, in order to chastise that hon. member.

Mr. Blais: Sit down when Mr. Speaker stands up.

Mr. Alexander: The parliamentary secretary said nothing about the concern which is being registered by many Canadians regarding pension plans, and that concern was also registered by the province of Ontario. Another concern of the province of Ontario which the parliamentary secretary neglected to mention is the use of pension plan funds. They are directed to provinces which use them for their own capital