

Canada Pension Plan

I should like now to deal very briefly with the handling of the modest reserves which actuarial reports indicate will accumulate under the Canada pension plan. I use the word "modest" intentionally and in all sincerity because although these reserves appear substantial in dollar amount, they are quite modest in terms of benefits payable under the plan. These reserves are to be held in a separate fund. It is the intention of the government to invest approximately 50 per cent of these reserves in provincial or provincially guaranteed securities based on Canada pension plan contributions from the various participating provinces, and the remaining 50 per cent is to be invested in government of Canada securities. It is proposed to require in the legislation periodic consultations between the minister of finance and the provincial treasurers in this regard.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I wish to point out first, the plan is to be administered by the department of health and welfare who will be responsible for the payment of benefits, and that contributions under the plan are to be administered by the Department of National Revenue, and appropriate safeguards will be written into the legislation to assure that contributions are properly remitted.

The Canada pension plan proposed by this resolution will be of great benefit to all Canadians. I respectfully suggest that we move through the resolution stage as soon as possible so that all hon. members may have the opportunity of seeing the bill and of discussing it fully in an informed manner, both on second reading and when it is referred to the joint committee mentioned by the Minister of National Health and Welfare.

Mr. Nugent: Mr. Chairman, I hope I will not be very long in making my remarks tonight. I am sure I will hear that hope echoed very quickly from the other side. I think it is important to take a quick look, even at the resolution stage, to make sure that we are starting correctly on this pension plan. I am sure that all members in this house have probably, during the last political campaign or two, stated they were in favour of a pension plan for all Canadians. I have no doubt that every member in the house is anxious to see some pension plan brought forward. It is certainly a political hot potato. I do not think the political future of any member who is against a pension plan would be very secure. It is precisely this aspect of the situation that bothers me. I believe the feeling of political fear over this subject has become so intense that there is danger of our failing to be as critical as we should be, if this plan is to be all we hope it will be. Certainly, on the opposition side of the house

[Mr. Benson.]

it is our duty to take a critical look at this legislation to see that it does not contain the seeds of future trouble, and ensure that we get off on the right foot.

Frankly, I am bothered by several aspects of the resolution. To begin with, there is, I am sure, a desire in the committee to pass this stage without delay and I am wondering why there should be such a rush in connection with so important a measure. The sums of money involved in this scheme are large enough to stagger the imagination. It is a long term scheme affecting a great many people. It is a most complex subject. The sums of money which could be wasted if there is a mistake in the accounting or in the actuarial figures are of sufficient importance that we should be prepared to take a second look, check and recheck, to make sure where we are going. It is true the government has expressed a desire to get this through before Easter, but I am sure all of us who regarded that announcement with pleasure were not expecting to have a budget brought down before the recess. In other words, we had expected there would be a few more days in which to consider this measure at the resolution stage. I would say there are sufficient grounds for taking a further look at it because closer examination shows certain danger signals.

I notice that the hon. member for Parry Sound-Muskoka spoke on this subject during the debate on the address. He said he was in favour of a pension plan, but he also pointed out that it was his duty to be critical. He did a good job of analysing those parts of the plan which, he thought, could lead to trouble. He pointed out where it might be strengthened and, where, in his view, danger might exist. As a result there was a great deal of talk in his constituency, a great deal of political propaganda to the effect that he was against the bill. We are all aware that the Prime Minister suggested to this house that because we were questioning some aspects of it we were against a pension plan. I believe all hon. members must be reminded that their first duty is to make sure of the precise nature of the legislation with which they are asked to deal, and not to be unduly conscious of how political opponents may try to paint them. We must make sure we are right, and if someone else misrepresents our position, we have to put up with it.

There is one intimation that the pension plan may not be exactly what Canada wants. It is a fact that the province of Quebec did not consent to participate. If Premier Lesage and his government have decided that this pension plan is not worthy of their participation, this is some indication that either they