

Oral Questions

[English]

REQUEST FOR LEGISLATION TO PROTECT WORKERS' PENSIONS

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I put it to the Minister that the problem does not require further study. It is clear that employees who have contributed over the years to company pension plans in Canada face the risk, in fact the probability, that during economically depressed times such as we have been having, their pension plans will disappear with their jobs. Will the Minister bring forward legislative proposals to alter the Canada and Quebec Pension Plans to ensure that the pension contributions of employees, whether private or public, will be protected in the same way as the Royal Bank investment was protected in the case of CCM?

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, obviously the Hon. Member will have to do a little bit of study himself after having said the problem does not need study. In his first question he asked me whether I would study the matter, and then in his second question he said it does not need study. He should at least be consistent from one question to the other.

The Hon. Member suggests that we should amend the Canada and Quebec Pension Plans to achieve the purpose he mentions. He knows, or should know, that it is not by amending the Canada and Quebec Pension Plans that you can achieve that purpose. Contributions under the Canada and Quebec Pension Plans are fully protected, by the Quebec Government in the case of the Quebec Pension Plan, and by the Canadian Government in the case of the CPP. What the Hon. Member is worried about is private pension plans, and this is outside of the ambit of the Quebec and Canada Pension Plans. As I mentioned before, over 80 per cent of the pension plans in the private sector are under the control of the provinces. The question of the specific cases he has referred to should be addressed in particular to the Governments of the provinces concerned.

PROTECTION OF PRIVATE PENSION PLANS

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, as you know, I did not ask the Minister to study it further; I asked him to investigate that specific instance. More important, I know that the Canada and Quebec Pension Plans do not cover it, otherwise I would not have asked for changes in the law to cover it.

Will the Minister recognize the need for protection of private pension plans into which people have been paying all their lives? Will he recognize that there are significant numbers of workers in Canada who are now over the age of 55, who cannot find employment or get unemployment insurance because they have run out of benefits, and who do not qualify for assistance, and they cannot even get their pension money? Will the Government move to negotiate changes in the pension arrangements in order to protect the pension investments of Canadian workers?

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, if the Hon. Member is asking whether the federal Government will discuss this particular issue with the provinces and see whether they can take steps in their own area of jurisdiction to ensure better protection under pension plans, of course we will do it. We have been doing it in the past, and we will continue to do it.

However, as far as imposing any particular legislation on the provinces in that regard is concerned, the Hon. Member knows that this cannot be done and should not be done.

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● (1430)

NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION

SIZE OF CANADIAN CONTRIBUTION

Mr. Harvie Andre (Calgary Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Defence. Last November 18 in reply to a question from myself here in the House, the Minister stated, as reported on page 28979 of *Hansard*, that "Canada needs to take a back seat to no one in terms of its NATO contribution." At approximately the same time the Minister was presenting to his Cabinet colleagues a document that stated, among other things, and I quote:

If a major international crisis were to occur, the Canadian Forces could not make a credible contribution to deterrence.

The fundamental purpose of NATO is deterrence. By the Minister's own words in this Cabinet document, we contribute nothing to deterrences. For the sake of his own credibility, would the Minister at least admit to the House that he was in error last November and that in fact Canada is not contributing significantly, or even modestly, to NATO deterrences?

Hon. J.-J. Blais (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, the statement I made in November was valid in November. The statement I made then is still valid today. If the hon. gentleman were honest, Mr. Speaker, he would recognize that he had made allegations of like kind on a number of occasions in committee. I responded at that time. If he reviews the transcripts of the committee hearings he will see that I maintained the strength of Canada's contribution to NATO. I maintained, as well, the competence of that contribution.

The hon. gentleman knows that he made allegations which he claims were supposedly contained in a leaked document. He knows that I have refused to comment on any leaked document. He knows furthermore, Mr. Speaker, that if there were such a document, being a Cabinet document, it could not be subject to comment.

Mr. Andre: Mr. Speaker, one wonders how the Government expects to receive any respect at all from Canadians or our NATO allies, with that kind of attitude.