

*Canada Pension Plan Amendment*

repayment through income tax. This plan is the best of all the social security schemes that we have.

If the Canada Pension Plan cannot be adapted, and if the difficulties that the minister has pointed out are so profound, then we should go the other way. This would probably mean that each person in Canada would be entitled to a basic pension of \$250 or \$275 a month. It might be just as well for us to move in that direction because it would improve our old age security system to include some of the good features of the Canada Pension Plan. For instance, we could incorporate into the old age security benefit an option to include disability benefits so that if a person became disabled at age 50 or 55, he or she would be eligible for the old age pension. This would take us along the road to social justice. There are people in our society aged 55 who have worked very hard in an occupation that has worn them out. Most people would agree that good as our old age security system is, under certain circumstances of disability there should be provision for earlier retirement.

It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that we have to take a stand and do something about a pension for housewives. I hope the House of Commons finds a way of opening up the Canada Pension Plan to give justice to the women in our society or perhaps the House should give up the Canada Pension Plan and instead, improve the old age security plan. In order to come to some kind of resolution on this matter, I hope that all members of the House will allow the bill to receive second reading and go to committee where these things could be examined.

[Translation]

**Miss Monique Bégin (Saint-Michel):** Mr. Speaker, I admit that I am deeply confused to find myself in the somewhat ambiguous position of having to kill a bill. Let me explain that it concerns Bill C-108. I know that my words usually say the truth, but a hidden truth. Then, Bill C-108 was graciously introduced by my hon. colleague from Waterloo-Cambridge (Mr. Saltsman) for the benefit of Canadian women.

At the outset, I wish to point out to him that if he had a sharper awareness of the daily problems of the women in Canada working without pay, he would have made sure to call them "housemistresses" and not "housewives". He should have read the report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in which I had the honour of participating and which I co-authored. He would have seen one of the things that most hurt the 3½ million women who stay at home and work full time without any salary. Indeed, Statistics Canada asked them during the census: Are you working or are you a housewife?

This is a very complex problem, because it goes to the very roots of our society. However, I readily agree that my hon. colleague showed much good faith in attempting to present a private bill that would enable housemistresses to make full contributions, if I may say so, to the Canada Pension Plan, and certainly I hope, to the Quebec Pension Plan. But, of all he said in introducing his bill, I remember one thing that, I admit, shocked me. He said:

[English]

The working poor—they are a problem. I really regret I do not have any solution.

[Mr. Saltsman.]

● (1720)

[Translation]

He added a bit further on: For me, introducing this bill—I quote his words, not word for word, but as I remember them—is a matter of principle.

Mr. Speaker, in my case, my position is almost the opposite of his. To me the problem of principles, the big words of social justice are an ideal we strive for a bit more every day; to me that is something relative and not absolute. Who created the problem of house-mistresses in Canada? First of all, it is a problem of the "working poor" or the "poor". I pointed it out in my maiden speech when I first had the honour to address this assembly after being elected. The royal commission proved one thing to the Canadians who read the report: that the poorest of the poor in Canada are the women. In this regard, I shall express a few ideas in the course of this debate concerning an eventual contribution by house mistresses to the Canada Pension Plan.

What problem affects them most with regard to the Canada Pension Plan? Of course, I must say that after having held public hearings and done some research, the commission decided to include in its report a recommendation, which has been ground down in any event and in many ways since, recommendation that is closely related to Bill C-108 now before us.

I would like to revert to what we said actually. First, we said as regards women in Canada and the Canada Pension Plan that the most important difference is that existing between sexes in the Canada Pension Plan and it is to be found in the benefits granted to the spouses and children. Consequently, we recommended as the commission did that the legislation related to the Canada Pension Plan and the Quebec Pension Plan be amended so that the provisions concerning the wife and children of a male contributor may also apply to the husband and children of a female contributor.

This reform which is under way—and in this connection we have had a press release last April 5—is a technical reform involving more people and correcting a genuine injustice between sexes.

The other problem is different. Besides we had moderated our way of thinking at the time. Page 40 of the report reads as follows, and I quote:

Therefore, we recommend that (a) both the Canada and the Quebec Pension Plans be amended so that the spouse who remains at home . . .

We had the wisdom to foresee times still to come and we did not mention only women.

. . . can participate in the Plan and (b) the feasibility . . .

And God knows that we recommended measures rather than studies, but here we had to say:

. . . the feasibility be explored of:

- (i) crediting to the spouse remaining at home a portion of the contributions of the employed spouse and those contributions made by the employer on the employed spouse's behalf, and
- (ii) on an optional basis, permitting the spouse at home to contribute as a self-employed worker.

We did that for several reasons because few women and few groups came to request the Royal Commission on the Status of Women to include this recommendation in the