

My concern, and I think the concern of other hon. members from time to time, is that if we open a door of this kind we lay ourselves open to all sorts of demands for various kinds of exemptions from various groups under certain legislation. Therefore, the matter requires very careful study and examination. I do not know exactly what examination the government may have given the matter before recommending this bill to the House, but only in the standing committee can the considerations of the government be documented.

The hon. member for Waterloo-Cambridge indicated that the members of this religious group were willing to accept in some form their responsibility to the community as a whole. In other words, they were not merely seeking to evade the imposition of a tax, either directly or indirectly; they were in fact prepared to have their contributions go to some charity rather than the Canada Pension Plan. My feeling is that contributions to the Canada Pension Plan, either directly or indirectly, are for the common welfare of the Canadian people. Consequently, it might be that we should indicate to the members of this group that contributions to the plan should meet the criteria it is felt is required. If the Canada Pension Plan required the compulsory acceptance of a pension, then I would think their request for exemption from receiving benefits would be a different matter. But as we all know, taking a pension under the Canada Pension Plan or under the Old Age Security Act does require an initiative on the part of the individual citizen. It is only after the taking of that initiative that the benefits of either the Canada pension or old age security apply. This being the case, compulsory participation in the benefits of the plan does not really arise.

These are some of the issues that I feel are involved in this particular aspect of the bill and are the reasons I felt I should intervene briefly in the debate on second reading to express my views. I hope that after due consideration in committee the whole matter will be clarified, and we may be in a position to assess whether or not the government proposal is a wise one.

Mr. Jake Epp (Provencher): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the amendments to the Canada Pension Plan Act before the House in the form of Bill C-190, there are a few thoughts I should like to place on the record which I feel it is incumbent on members of the House to keep in mind as they view the proposed amendments.

One of the objections that has been aired in this House concerns universality. One of the hallmarks of the Canada Pension Plan was its universality; all Canadians participated, and by exempting specific groups this concept of universality would be broken. I should like to deal with that point a little later, but the Canada Pension Plan clearly makes exceptions to the concept of universality, if there is such a thing as an exception to universality. That point has been brought out constantly by speakers who have said the amendment should not pass.

The second point is in connection with security. I want to relate my comments not to the Old Order Mennonites or the Mennonite people in particular. I am not speaking for myself or representing people of Old Order Mennonite or Amish background. The point that has been made in favour of those people does not apply to my constituents.

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The question of security has been mentioned. It has been pointed out that a pension plan builds up security for people in their old age or in case they become disabled. It gives them a fund so they do not become wards of the state. Under the Hutterian principle of common holdings, it is the responsibility of the communal society as a whole to take care of those who cannot help themselves, such as the elderly or those who suffer misfortune and are unable to contribute in a general way to the economic well-being of the colony. So I do not believe that the second point, namely that their security would be hampered or tampered with and that we must provide them with security by legislation, applies to the Hutterian Brethren of which I speak.

The matter that disturbed me the most about the opposition to the amendments to Bill C-190 was the direct statement that the Hutterian people were not loyal to the country or were not loyal citizens. I reject that statement completely.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Epp: Just because groups think differently from the way I think or might have a different system of dividing its members' goods and providing the services they need, does not mean that they are not loyal to this country, that they are not loyal citizens. Under the tenets of faith of the Hutterian Brethren, when they talk of loyalty to a country their first loyalty is to God. Under the precepts governing their religious beliefs, the precepts of God cannot be violated by the laws of the country in which they live. So that is their concept of loyalty so far as citizenship is concerned.

That being the case, what are the facts of the matter? The Canada Pension Plan did not provide for universality; it clearly exempted groups of people who are members of religious orders and who took the vow of perpetual poverty. It also exempted those who were church employed. These were the two basic exemptions and the Canada Pension Plan did not apply to such groups.

Since the inception of the Canada Pension Plan in 1966, certain groups have not had to contribute under the terms of the act. I suggest that the Hutterian Brethren fall within this class of exemption in light of their tenets of faith. First of all, they do take the vow of perpetual poverty. Second, they hold all things in common. Third, they are church employed, the church being the communal administrative body of every Hutterian colony.

I should just like to quote their vow of baptism, and every person who becomes a member of a Hutterian society must accept this vow:

That no one shall have any private possessions any more: for one gives and surrenders himself to the Lord and his church with all that he has and is able to do, as it was in the original apostolic church, when no one said of his possessions that they were his own, but all things were common to them.

In order to be a Hutterian you must take this vow of baptism; you cannot be born a full-fledged member. Therefore my point is that, the Canada Pension Plan having already made exceptions, the principle of universality is debatable. Then, under the terms of the exemptions made under the Canada Pension Plan I submit that the Hutterian Brethren are just as much entitled to exemption from