

Canada Pension Plan (No. 2)

friends to my left from their jobs, in which they have displayed a high degree of incompetence.

Mrs. Grace MacInnis (Vancouver Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, I should like to begin by repeating briefly what has been said very thoroughly by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). We wish to compliment the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) on this piece of legislation, as far as it goes. Let me say that it does move in a direction very much to our taste. We like the idea of fully escalating the benefits, which I understand will run from the beginning of the plan as though there never had been this 2 per cent ceiling. We also like the new earnings ceilings which have been established for 1974 and 1975. This is a good feature of the new bill.

Let me now say something about the Minister of National Health and Welfare which has not been said during this debate. We worry a good deal about the stresses and strains which tend to pull the provinces apart. When I heard the minister state yesterday that the changes to be made by this bill had been agreed to unanimously by the provinces, I made up my mind to express the feeling that this minister is doing more than any other member on the other side to achieve a measure of unity in this country. He has not tried to browbeat the provinces like recalcitrant children, but has outlined his schemes to the provinces. He has not acted like a father who knows best and suggested they would have to sign on the dotted line, but has asked for their opinions, their suggestions and proposed amendments. Furthermore, he has listened and taken account of their suggestions in drafting his legislation. I believe he has done a great deal for this country, allowing us to realize that no matter what the differences of opinion are, and they are very deep and dividing among the provinces, there is a possibility of making social security measures work in a co-operative way by finding common ground among the provinces.

If a minister of national health and welfare had risen in this House a few years ago and said there was unanimous agreement in respect of a social measure of this type, we would have been inclined to think he was dreaming or that we were dreaming. This minister has proven that this can be done and I compliment him on his method of working with the provinces. I hope this method will be extended to many other fields. Before I complete my remarks I will be pointing out some of his shortcomings, but I wanted to make those remarks today because I firmly believe them.

One thing which seems most regrettable in connection with this piece of legislation is the fact that it is being considered as the type of bill the opposition will not be able to amend. I think it would be a very good thing if it were left open for us to move appropriate amendments, which could be considered in the committee and then later in this House. I know the point of order involved to the effect that this involves the expenditure of money, but anything that is worthwhile in this House does involve such an expenditure. It would be better if members were given leeway in respect of moving amendments instead of having to plead with the minister to introduce certain amendments which he might find it difficult to do.

[Mr. Oberle.]

● (1530)

If we could introduce amendments we might even have some hope of getting them through, but if we should ask the minister to introduce amendments, most of which perhaps he has been pressed to introduce already and has turned down, then I do not think there is a likelihood of having them adopted. However, I should like to mention some of the important amendments we have in mind. I wish to begin by pointing out that the main amendment that is necessary is one to provide equality in the Canada Pension Plan for women along with men. I realize this point has been discussed, but I wish to go into it more thoroughly. I believe it is not only a bad oversight, but is a very definite wrong to the women of this country not to include this amendment in the Canada Pension Plan bill which is before us.

It is three years since the Royal Commission on the Status of Women completed its report which was tabled in this House. At page 81 of this report I find the following:

The most significant sex difference in the Canada Pension Plan lies in the benefits provided for the spouse and children of a contributor. The husband of a female contributor is not entitled to any pension unless he is disabled at the time of her death and was being maintained wholly or substantially by her before her death. Nor are children of a female contributor entitled to any benefits unless 'the child was, in prescribed circumstances, being maintained wholly or substantially' by her. Under section 527 (1) of the Canadian Pension Plan Regulations, being maintained 'wholly or substantially' means that 'the support in cash, kind or services, other than services provided by way of normal household or family duties as a mother or wife, that a deceased female contributor had provided for the necessities of life, health, welfare, care, education or advancement of her dependent child or her disabled husband was, in the opinion of the Director, equal in amount or value to more than 50% of any such support provided for those purposes by (a) all persons in respect of her dependent child; or (b) all persons except his or her dependent child, in respect of her disabled husband.'

I have read this because it is three years since, in very clear and unmistakable language, the Commission which travelled all over Canada and registered the opinion of the women of Canada laid down the principle that the survivor benefits under the Canada Pension Plan should be made equal in respect of men and women. This, I believe, was a very clear and unmistakable line of operation.

Since that time the ministers in charge of implementing measures concerning women have said they are studying the matter. We know that this proposal to have the survivor benefits equal as between men and women has been discussed, not only at the departmental and ministerial levels but also with the provinces. So far nothing has issued from these discussions. We know that every large women's organization in the country has been seeking this particular measure. Just yesterday the National Council of Women, probably the largest and best known of any women's organization in this country and certainly I believe the most representative of the various types of women across this country, said this in a précis of its brief: In the matter of fringe benefits and pension plans, Council asks that all references to sex and marital status be eliminated so that women would benefit equally under the provisions of the Canada Labour Code.

The National Council of Women, the Status of Women Organization, the Business and Professional Women and