

● (1240)

In the circumstances, I am pleased to see that this matter is to be referred to the committee previously mentioned, where we can deal with the issues raised in this bill, issues concerning the pensions of public servants, members of parliament, judges, senators and others. There will be ample opportunity to debate these matters in committee. Frankly, I want the committee to consider the general question of pensions. What is a pension? We must look at some anomalies involving pensions. For instance, some people can leave one part of the public service and gain employment in another without loss of pension benefit. They carry their pension with them. I understand that if members of the armed services or of the public service, including the diplomatic service, are elected to parliament they receive the benefit of their pension. They have earned that benefit. But others in society are not granted similar benefits. I am thinking of men and women who serve in parliament and who, because of their experience in public life, are offered appointments to the bench. One could say that they can refuse. I suppose everyone has the opportunity to refuse almost anything—except the ability to eat and breathe. People have the opportunity to refuse, but I want to see some consistency in the treatment of pensions.

If the committee concludes that a pension is earned, it should not be lost in any circumstances except death. I know there are provisions governing death benefits. In no circumstances should the pension be taken away if we consider it as earned. If we are prepared to give this idea lip service and pass legislation governing some pension benefits, I suggest we should take a good look at other sorts of pension benefits.

Yesterday evening the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, in a speech I enjoyed, mentioned the case of members of the armed services who because they do not take advantage of a certain provision within a specified time limit are penalized with respect to pension benefits. In other words, they are deemed by statute not to have a right to something they have earned. The committee will need to examine this kind of provision to see how it affects members of the armed services who take employment with the public service of Canada.

We must also consider whether superannuation should not be related to the best years of employment instead of the last years of service. I am thinking, for example, of the men and women employed in the aircraft operations groups of the professional institute. Their work is intense, physical and debilitating and there is the danger that they cannot maintain peak performance throughout their professional careers. I think that is an occupational hazard. I am sure that other groups in the public service are in the same position. I want the committee to consider whether superannuation should not be calculated on the basis of the best years of service instead of the last years.

I am glad to note that the government is attempting to remove differentiations as between salaries paid to men and to women for the same jobs in the public service of Canada. This attempt, being made in International Women's Year, is sound and I support the provisions of the bill which go in that direction. This is a large bill, with 106 clauses.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): And 89 pages.

State Pensions

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): The bill is complicated and important. I am glad the government has seen fit to bring it forward now. I hope debate on it will be short; therefore I will say no more. I think much of the debate will take place in committee. I am sure that because we pride ourselves on being fair-minded we shall consider the equities of the matter which are important to hon. members and to certain people whom we represent. As I say, I think the debate should take place in committee and I commend the government for bringing the bill forward at this time.

Mr. Donald W. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): Madam Speaker, I was pleased to learn from the exchange earlier this morning that the bill is to be referred to a committee on which I serve. As has been said, this is an omnibus bill. I have always been afraid that omnibus bills are not proper, that there is, shall we say, something the matter with them. I am under the impression that the government has introduced this omnibus bill in an attempt to tidy up certain matters which have been left hanging. In short, it is a housekeeping bill, although a complicated one. I am pleased to learn, therefore, that we shall be given the opportunity to examine it more fully in the Standing Committee on Employer-Employee Relations in the Public Service.

I hope there will not be any need to refer this matter again to that committee if it should happen that because of the committee's present preoccupations it cannot deal with this matter before the end of the present session. I understand that committees, special and otherwise, die at the end of a session and must be revived in a new session. I see several members of the committee present in the House. I hope, therefore, that the reference of this matter to the committee will hold good in the next session and will be continued in the next session, if that should prove necessary, so that we can deal with this particular matter.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): The bill itself is a reference.

Mr. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): This morning I want to deal with two aspects of the bill. As the royal recommendation suggests, the purpose of this bill in part is to provide equality of status for males and females. That may be a tribute to the present year, International Women's Year, but it does not go far enough. I feel it is mere lip service—at a time when "LIP" is not the most pleasant expression to use. I mean that it is merely a verbal accommodation of a principle which we are not really incorporating into law. I maintain, Madam Speaker—and here I enlist your support—that there will be no equality of status in these matters until it is fully recognized that in a case in which a pension is involved, the surviving spouse who may not have been the breadwinner has exactly the same rights as those which would have been enjoyed by the breadwinner if he had survived. They are the same as enjoyed by the breadwinner when he survives.

● (1250)

As hon. members know—I have mentioned this in other debates—if the spouse should die, the breadwinner normally carries on with a 100 per cent pension, whereas the non-breadwinner in a situation of that sort suffers a 50 per