

State Pensions

made about lowering the age at which a retiring prime minister can draw his pension. So far as the present Prime Minister is concerned, I suggested that we could bring the age down to 50.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Careful, your slip is showing.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I think my hon. friend from Edmonton West agrees with me.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Philosophically speaking, of course.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Yes, philosophically speaking. We are not dealing in personalities at all. In any case, those are the points I wanted to make by way of stating my approval of the bill. As I say, I think those who have done the technical work on the bill have produced an excellent job, and that all of the various pension and superannuation statutes that will be amended by the bill will be in better shape when this process is over.

Since a good deal of what the parliamentary secretary had to say and a good deal of the emphasis in the bill deal with equality of status between male and female persons, I should like to say a few words about this particular aspect of the matter. It is true that there is to be equality on the contribution side, and I welcome this. Female employees in the public service will pay the same contribution as male employees, just as female members of parliament have been paying the same contribution as male members of parliament. There is also an attempt to establish equality on the benefit side, and I believe the details that have been announced go a long way in this direction.

I realize that when we are dealing with language, whether English or French, we have trouble with the use of the words "he" and "she". So we usually provide a general covering sentence or paragraph that says that when the act refers to "he" it can mean "she", that when it refers to "him" it can mean "her". I also note that although in most cases the language goes even further and accepts the fact that there will be female public servants who leave widowers, and that there will be female members of parliament who will leave widowers, when it comes to two offices in this country, that of the Prime Minister and the Governor General, as I read the legislation it is not anticipated that any woman will ever make it. I am really surprised that the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald) is not here to object.

On page 76 of the bill there is reference to the possible death of a prime minister. I am not predicting it; I am just saying there is reference to it. Clause 88(2) provides:

There shall be paid to any person who, on or after the coming into force of this subsection, is widow of a person described in subsection (1), if she was the wife of that person at the time he held office of Prime Minister—

There is no recognition that the Prime Minister might be a woman and might leave as a survivor a widower.

Then on page 81 of the bill we find the same thing with respect to the office of the Governor General. The possibility of a woman being governor general is not far fetched. A woman is Her Majesty's representative in the province of Ontario. Yet on page 81 we read this provision:

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

(2) Where a Governor General dies while holding office as such, there shall be paid to his widow an annuity equal to one-half of the annuity that would have been paid to her husband if he had retired on the day on which he died.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): This is covered in the interpretations section.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I know that if we do have a female prime minister or a female governor general and one of them dies, the surviving widower will be covered by the interpretation section and by the rhetoric that is in this legislation. But since we found it possible to go further in all other cases and admit that there are going to be women public servants and women members of parliament, I think we might also admit that some day we might have a woman prime minister as well as a woman governor general in this country.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): We have males and females enjoying equality of status and human rights.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): My hon. friend is quite right. The rhetoric is there. Legally the point is covered, there is no question. If we have a female prime minister who dies and leaves a widower, he will be covered. But the very capable persons who drafted this bill and do such a good job on these things just seem to have fallen into the expectation in this country that the Prime Minister will always be a man. I would gladly trade the man we now have as Prime Minister for a woman.

● (2140)

An hon. Member: How about Beryl?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Let us not be too specific. I am speaking philosophically.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): That puts a low value on woman, though.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): The more serious ways in which equality has not been achieved are perhaps two, and one of them is the point the hon. member for Edmonton West has already referred to, namely, in what he calls the "gold-digger" clause. I dislike using that phrase because it suggests right away that someone is trying to get something, but the hon. member is perfectly right in his contention that the provision we are talking about should be changed.

I am going to refer not just to a second wife who became a wife before the employee retired, such as the example already cited. I know of a case of a woman whose husband died just recently. They had been married for over 25 years after the husband had retired from the public service. There was no widow's pension for her because she married him after his retirement. To me, this is most unfair.

This situation runs through all our pension legislation including the Public Service Superannuation Act, retirement acts for personnel of the armed forces or the RCMP, members of parliament and so on. The only place that I know where a person having gone on pension and, marrying thereafter, leaves a pension to the widow is the veteran who gets a pension under the Pension Act. If that veteran's pension is 48 per cent or more, when he dies his widow gets a widow's pension under that legislation. The hon. member for Edmonton West suggested some things tonight that he knows I would not agree with, but on this point he was