

supposed views and studies of organizations such as the minister mentioned.

● (1430)

The bill, as we see it, does two things. It provides, in the event of a marriage breakdown, where the marriage has lasted three years or more, that the combined assets of the couple can be split between the parties 50-50. We think it is a good move and support it. The bill also makes a slight change with respect to women contributors. It provides that if a person has been a contributor but stays home a few years to raise children, provided the children are not over the age of seven those years can be dropped from the number of years involved in the calculation of personal retirement benefits—in this case they would usually be payable to a woman—at age 65.

I said earlier these two changes are small in their effect. Because the bill does nothing for women who do not work after marriage but devote their time to bringing up children, it is not overly significant. All our pension legislation, with the exception of the old age security pension legislation, provides for payments to women only in as far as a woman has been married to a man who qualified for a pension under legislation providing for veterans' pensions, CNR pensions, public service pensions or the Canada Pension Plan. There is no provision for paying benefits to women who stay at home, raise children and look after the household. This bill does not recognize their contribution. We think it is wrong. The rationale behind this shortcoming is that the Canada Pension Plan is an employment-related pension plan. We think the minister's statement given earlier today is based on too narrow, too restrictive and too legalistic thinking.

Let me repeat what the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre suggested on second reading of this bill. The hon. member suggested we should provide that every person between the ages which apply in the Canada Pension Plan, namely, the 47-year period between the ages of 18 and 65, who is not employed and not contributing to the Canada Pension Plan should get a certain percentage of credit toward a supplement to his old age security pension, a certain percentage for each year he is not a CPP contributor. Although a specific percentage perhaps is not too important at this time, my colleague suggested that in principle we should think about a 2 per cent per year contribution up to a maximum of 40 years. That would allow a woman to get about 80 per cent of what the Canada Pension Plan pays to those who contributed. If we were to do that, when the couple retires the husband could look forward to receiving the Canada Pension Plan benefits to which he contributed, and old age security, and the wife could look forward to the old age security payment and about 80 per cent of the Canada Pension Plan.

We are going to support the bill, but think the minister needs some new advisers who will be a good deal more innovative and adventuresome in their thinking than his present advisers.

Canada Pension Plan

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. I must advise hon. members that if the Chair recognizes the minister, he will automatically close debate on the bill. Is this agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I thank hon. members for the contributions made on behalf of their own parties on this subject. I think all in this House recognize the important contributions housewives make to society. The Statistics Canada study on the subject was designed to show the major contribution which housewives doing voluntary or unpaid work in the home make to our gross national product.

We must stress one point. The Canada Pension Plan has nothing to do with meritorious or non-meritorious work. It is related to the salaries and wages people are paid. The plan operates on the basis of the actual wages or salaries paid, not on the quality or type of work done. The legislation does not give people the right to contribute to the Canada Pension Plan. It creates the obligation to contribute to the Canada Pension Plan. People have no choice except to pay a certain amount of their salary, as determined by law, into the Canada Pension Plan fund.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald) raised certain arguments concerning the right to contribute to the plan, but never concentrated on the other aspect of the argument, namely, what is the real nature of the plan? I suggest that aspect should be examined carefully. The hon. member also mentioned the spouse's allowance. I stress that this question relates to whichever spouse is the older. The reason for written consent is that the person who has a direct and full right to an old age security pension could see his or her pension reduced by the amount paid by way of spouse's allowance. It is normal, in such circumstances, for the spouse over age 65 to give written consent for a possible reduction of the pension to which that spouse would otherwise be entitled.

I regret that the hon. member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow) should have expressed his unfavourable views about the Advisory Council on the Status of Women. My only comment would be this: if he cannot trust the independent advice of such a body, I wonder if he would even trust the advice of provincial governments of his own political persuasion. As I said this morning, not a single provincial government is willing to propose or support the principle of voluntary contributions with regard to spouses at home. The government of Ontario so far has opposed even the relatively small proposed change with regard to spouses who stay home to look after children. One cannot doubt what their reaction would be to the kinds of proposals and ideas expressed this afternoon. The question of remuneration of spouses at home and their rights to contribute to various schemes raises certain difficulties. The question has been studied extensively by various bodies. Perhaps the question cannot be resolved aptly by use of the Canada Pension Plan, but it may require some other mechanism for its solution.