

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Hon. members in all parts of the House are making what, in my view, are excellent speeches in this debate. For the most part they are agreeing that the bill is a necessary one and that it makes progress in the direction of establishing equality between men and women. But member after member is listing the areas and respects in which that equality will not yet be achieved even after the passage of Bill C-16.

I might add that Bill C-52, which will come before us some time later, might also be included among the bills that seek to establish equality. Bill C-52 is one that deals with pension rights under a number of pieces of legislation, and in all of those pieces of legislation it attempts to establish equality between men and women.

It is in this pension area that there is one shortcoming that I should like to mention. There have been discussions, and I believe that there is agreement that the second reading debate on this bill will conclude tonight. Therefore those of us who are now taking part are speaking for even a shorter period of time than was agreed to publicly a short time ago. This is my reason for dealing with just one subject.

I believe that it is a piece of gross unfairness that most pension plans—this is true of the Public Service Superannuation Act, it is true of the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances Act, and it is true of the pension plans of the Canadian National Railways and the Canadian Pacific Railway and many other employers—provide that if there is a survivor pension it works in a strange way. If a man and wife have lived and worked together, presumably they are both responsible for whatever equity they have established. But when retirement time comes, assuming they are both still alive, a pension, whatever its full amount may be, is drawn by the husband. I am speaking of things as they are in most cases.

Now, if the husband dies before the wife, the usual plan is that the widow draws a pension which is only a portion of what her husband's pension was; in most cases it is 50 per cent. In the case of members of parliament, our widows will be entitled to a pension of 60 per cent. But in any case that is the situation. If the husband dies first the widow's pension is only a portion, in most cases 50 per cent. But if the wife dies first and the widower stays on, his pension is not 50 per cent, or 60 per cent, or 75 per cent, it is the whole amount, 100 per cent. We have had this kind of arrangement with us for so long that, like lots of other things, we have accepted it as though it were perfectly proper. I do not think it is.

● (2130)

It seems to me it should not matter which of the marriage partners dies first so far as the amount of the pension that goes to the survivor is concerned. My preference would be that it would be 100 per cent in either case, but if for actuarial reasons in order to get this sort of thing started we have to start with 75 per cent or 90 per cent in either case, let us do so. If it is proper for one of the marriage partners who survives to have a full pension, why does that not apply to the other?

I hope we will soon start to make progress in this field. There is no better place to begin this sort of change in respect of pensions than with those plans which are under

Status of Women

the aegis of the federal government. The Public Service Superannuation Act is a case in point, and our own members of parliament pension plan is another. There are also the plans of the RCMP, the Canadian Armed Forces, and all the other plans that come directly under the government, as well as plans like those of the Canadian National Railways, Air Canada and so on.

As other members have been pointing out today, there is no use boasting about legislation establishing equality when so many areas of inequality remain. I am glad there are some points of equality which have been established under the Canada Pension Plan, and I am glad that under Bill C-52 there a number of instances in which a working woman who dies will be able to leave to her surviving widower the same benefit the working man would leave if he died first and left a surviving widow.

That does not touch this one point I am trying to focus on tonight, namely, that when both partners to the marriage survive into the retirement period, and one dies, why should not the benefits to the survivor be the same whether that survivor is a widow or a widower? I press that point as one that should be considered by the federal government because of the many pension plans for which it is responsible, and I also press the point that those who are dealing with pension plans in private industry should consider this as well.

There is no use muttering about things always having been this way, or about it being the man who has been the one to go out and earn the pension. They have both earned it, and if there is something joint or equal as between men and women let us make it equal all the way. I hope, therefore, that this point is one of those still unfinished bits of business that we will deal with at the earliest possible time. If we believe in equality, let us practice it all the way.

Mr. Douglas Roche (Edmonton-Strathcona): Madam Speaker, among all the interesting events of today is this long awaited debate on the omnibus bill respecting women in Canada. The debate has hardly begun. We have hardly begun to discuss the serious ramifications opened up by the minister when introducing this bill, yet I understand the bill is about to be given second reading and sent to the committee.

I ask myself if this is all there is in the Canadian parliament to International Women's Year, that is, a handful of speakers in a mostly empty chamber? I ask myself if it is really possible that only one of nine women members of parliament wished to speak in this debate? Let me be fair to my friend, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Campbell), by saying that I have the impression she has given up her place in this debate in order that I might speak. If that is so, then apparently there has been some change made during International Women's Year in that apparently it is now gentlemen before ladies. If she intended to speak, then I exclude her from my general criticism of women in parliament for not having spoken during this debate.

Let me say to the women in parliament that the women of Canada want to hear their voices in parliament, but when they have the opportunity where are they? The hon. member for Skeena (Mrs. Campagnolo) made a speech,