

*State Pensions*

There are a number of provisions in the bill that have the effect of straightening out certain anomalies. These apply not only to the Public Service Superannuation Act but also to the acts affecting members of the Canadian armed forces, members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and all the other branches and agencies with pensions under the aegis of the federal government. We welcome them, Mr. Speaker. There are not many of them that have a sense of urgency that might apply to the instance of equality of status at death, but at any rate they are welcome improvements.

The bill contains as well some matters that my colleagues and I do not like. As other speakers have said, the bill is also grossly deficient in some of the provisions it should contain. We therefore feel that, as a total package, the bill is unacceptable. It has been before us since February 17 of this year, which is the day it had first reading. There have been many weeks and months in which to deal with it, but no, it was not given second reading until a few weeks ago. We then had to deal with it in the Special Joint Committee on Employer-Employee Relations under pressure, because of the time element in regard to the one point I made, and perhaps in regard to one or two others.

In view of the request that has been made so often for other much needed improvements in public service superannuation, I think this has been a shabby way to treat us. I still think, with all the respect I have for the job done by the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Francis), that the issues that were raised in committee were of such substance that we had the right to have the attendance of the President of the Treasury Board.

I want to say a few words about some of the points that are not dealt with in the bill that I think should be, the absence of which makes the bill unacceptable to us. I shall then speak about some of the matters in the bill which also make the bill unacceptable to us.

Allusions have been made to some of the matters I have in mind. I have already referred to the so-called equality of status in the bill, which is only equality to death. We feel that if there is going to be equality between men and women, their pensions ought to be equal. If a husband and wife live and work together and between them build up a certain pension right, what is there that is just about a law that provides a full pension so long as the man lives, but if he dies his widow gets only 50 per cent? If the woman dies first, the man who survives gets the full 100 per cent pension.

If the government is going to mouth this phrase about equality of status, we think it should go all the way and provide for equal pensions to the partners of a marriage where either one of them is employed in the public service. We raised this matter in the special joint committee, but of course we got the answer that it was beyond the terms of the Governor General's recommendation and could not be proceeded with for that reason. We were also told that it would be very costly. I recognize that, Mr. Speaker, but there are lots of things that are very costly which we can do in this place because we think they are right. I suggest that the phrase "equality of status" is a good phrase but that we really should put it into effect.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

I do not accuse the government of any misleading language in the actual clauses of the bill. The title "equality of status" is there, but when it comes to the terms of the bill, what is meant is equality between male and female contributors, not equality between man and wife, between men and women in general terms. We regret very much that the government has not seen fit to move in the direction of equality of status in real terms so far as men and women are concerned, and this failure makes the bill very unacceptable to us. It may be that the contribution rate would have had to go up, and that instead of a 100 per cent pension in either case the pension would have had to be 90 per cent if either husband or wife survived. But why not have the same percentage—whatever it is—whichever partner survives?

When we lost out on that point or got nowhere with it, and when we received no answers other than the three I have already mentioned—that it exceeded the governor general's recommendation, that it was very costly, and that the government just was not prepared to do this at this time—we then tried to argue that if we could not get a 100 per cent pension or the same pension for man and wife, at least the survivor's pension ought to be something better than 50 per cent. After all, survivors of members of parliament who qualify for a pension get a pension equal to 60 per cent of members pensions. Why do we hold it at 50 per cent for the widows of public servants? This again was said to be beyond the terms of the Governor General's recommendation, and beyond the capacity of the fund at its present level, so therefore we got nowhere with that either. I do not fault the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board for not being able to deal with this in full. After all, it is a matter of government policy. But it was this sort of thing that I feel should have resulted in the presence of the President of the Treasury Board, and he should be here today to speak for the government on the matter.

Since I am talking of equality of status, and about widows in one capacity or another, may I move on to the point already mentioned by the hon. members for Esquimalt-Saanich (Mr. Munro) and Dartmouth-Halifax East (Mr. Forrestall), a point that has frequently been raised in the House and in committee by the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert). I refer to widows of public servants, or others that come under this bill, who married a public servant or pensioner after he had retired. Back in the old days when retirement was much later there may have been something to this prohibition, but it does not seem sensible today that a woman who can be the widow of a man after a marriage of 20 or 25 years—there are such cases—gets no pension because she married him after he left the public service, or the RCMP or armed forces. We think that is out of date and that this should be corrected.

● (1640)

I may tell the House that one of the delegations which appeared before us was the Federal Superannuates National Association, represented by Mr. Fred Whitehouse of Victoria, who is its national secretary treasurer. He told us in plain language in the committee that he and those who were with him at an interview with the President of the