

well founded. This bill could very well have been before us for the last eight to ten months. Indeed it should have been in front of us so that the attention that the complexity of the clauses demands could have been given to it.

As we have made clear, both in committee and on second reading, the bill is deficient in a wide number of areas. I do not want hon. members to leave this Chamber believing we have done wonders for those who fall within the ambit of the act. We have not. The act is still full of anomalies and examples of discrimination; the hon. member for Esquimalt-Saanich (Mr. Munro) has just called attention to one of them.

While we welcome the move on the part of the government to clear up some of the anomalies, particularly those as between the sexes, we feel constrained to point out that all the anomalies have not been cleared up by a long shot. I might mention the concern felt by my hon. friend from Edmonton West with respect to the so-called gold-digger clause. A woman spends 20 years living with a man, leaves him because she finds he is with someone else—it may be for only three years—and then discovers she has lost benefits to which she had been entitled. This is only one of 23 areas which have been identified by members of the New Democratic Party and by members of the Official Opposition on second reading and, particularly, in committee. They require the attention of the government in the immediate future.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Ongoing consideration.

Mr. Forrestall: That is the phrase. They require ongoing consideration. Time and time again we put forward serious amendments in areas where action should have been taken a long time ago. But we were under the hammer, subject to the firm direction of the parliamentary secretary that there would be no amendments imported into the bill which did not fall within the narrow recommendation which accompanied it.

I suggest the recommendation was deliberately made narrow in order to preclude an attempt by members to secure necessary changes in a number of areas. For example, there is the question of the benefits which accrue to widows and so forth. Then again, there is the so-called 85 rule with respect to members of the Canadian Armed Forces. This is an anomaly which should not be permitted to continue. Yet it does. We discussed some 30 amendments. The government put forward 21 or 22 amendments. They have gone a long way toward clearing up some of the anomalies with respect to pensions.

I do not intend to discuss in detail the areas which need further examination, or to identify them. I will simply say to the parliamentary secretary that we compliment him on the way in which he has handled this bill, and we recognize that the restrictions imposed on members of this chamber in terms of their ability to correct some of the ongoing hardships affecting the people concerned are not his doing but that of his minister.

I echo the comments made with respect to the absence of the minister, and close by indicating that passage of this bill does not mean that members of this House are in any way satisfied that we have done an honourable or a good thing for our superannuates in the Public Service of Canada, because we have not. I trust this feeling is shared

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by members on both sides of the Chamber. The least which would be acceptable to us this afternoon would be an indication from the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Sharp) that he intends to look into the anomalies and conflicts which continue to exist, causing downright hardship in some cases. We welcome the amendments to the degree that they do effect certain changes in the act, but we would have welcomed an indication from the minister himself as to the government's intentions, particularly in the light of the restraint program and the attitude taken by himself and his colleagues toward spending programs over the next two or three years.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, this is a bill which has presented my colleagues and me with a certain amount of difficulty, and I trust this will be understood by those who are familiar with what is in it. There are some things in it which are not only good but have a quality of urgency about them.

Perhaps the most urgent item is the provision under the heading "Equality of Status" which appears several times in the bill. I think it is a misnomer; it is almost a joke, because all it provides is equality at death. The so-called equality between male and female contributors is just that. The bill provides that a female public servant at death will leave the same survivor benefits as a male public servant. That is hardly the kind of equality International Women's Year is all about.

Mrs. Campagnolo: Better than nothing.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): The hon. member for Skeena (Mrs. Campagnolo) says it is better than nothing and she is perfectly right. But I hope that for some of us death is still so far off that we shall see equality of status in life, not just equality at the point of death.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): This bill gives a female public servant the right to leave survivor benefits equal to those a male public servant can leave. From here on, female public servants will be paying for that right by contributing the same rate of premiums into the fund as a male public servant does. I said there was some urgency about this provision. This is because only those public servants who are in the public service, on strength, when this bill becomes law will be covered by it.

● (1630)

In other words, if a female public servant retired in Ottawa yesterday before the bill becomes law, she would not be covered. It would therefore be unfortunate if this bill were delayed in a way that would interfere with the rights of some who might be contemplating retirement, or who might be in a position where they have to retire very soon. Mind you, Mr. Speaker, that could have been avoided. All that was needed was to put in a bill a clause providing that, with respect to this so-called equality of status, there would be retroactivity to a certain date. This can still be done. The bill can still be rewritten and corrected in many ways to cover this point. As I say, that is one provision of the bill that has a certain element of urgency as well as being right, and we strongly support that part of the bill.