

they would have a split pension credit with a husband who had a hard time earning a decent pension for himself. Then there are other problems, such as marriage breakdown, separation or divorce. Certainly these are matters that would have to be resolved. This is why I think housewives should have the elasticity of the old age security system, where they could be permitted to receive old age security at a lower age if they were without means.

I promised not to go beyond my time, and I shall not do so. I want to assure the hon. member across the way that I am just as keen as she on including housewives in a pension scheme and recognizing their value as housewives. Until such time as housewives earn money of their own, I do not want to see them included in some inadequate pension split with husbands who in far too many cases are not earning sufficient to assure an income for their wives, be they living with their husband, separated, divorced or eventually widowed.

Mr. Rod Blaker (Lachine-Lakeshore): Mr. Speaker, it is a well known expression that "such-and-such is a rather difficult act to follow" I suggest that in considering this private member's bill, Bill C-108, with respect to pensions for housewives it is an extraordinarily difficult act to follow when two lady members of parliament have commented on the subject. I notice the hon. member for Saint-Michel (Miss Bégin) has moved to behind the curtains for a moment.

[Translation]

But if I could reassure the hon. member for Saint-Michel (Miss Bégin) concerning the English word "cute"—

[English]

She used the word "cute" to describe the bill, and I agree with her because it is an oversimplified bill that does not go to the heart of the difficulties of women in Canada.

[Translation]

If I may explain the meaning in English of the word "cute", I will say that it is "bow-legged"—

[English]

In other words, to be "bow-legged" is to have a body with a fault. That is a perfect description of this bill, one about which the hon. member for Saint-Michel has no need to be embarrassed. This bill is a body with a fault, because it does not go to the essence of the problem that was considered by the hon. member for Saint-Michel and by the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis). May I pay my respects to the hon. member for Waterloo-Cambridge (Mr. Saltzman) for putting forward this bill which does go to the essence of one of the many problems women have in this country. But I noticed that the two previous speakers commented not so much upon the details of the bill as upon some of the problems in the over-all sense that relate to the status of women in Canada.

If I may be permitted to continue this approach to the subject, I would tend to examine the legal and economic rights of women in Canada. Before too much of my time elapses, may I briefly comment that there are many problems respecting Bill C-108 in regard to defining a housewife as an employee. With the greatest respect to the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway, I do not think it is

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possible that in the near future we can begin to pay everybody who is defined as a housewife—whatever that definition might be—some kind of salary. I say that not because I object to paying housewives a salary but, rather, simply because obviously the cost to the public treasury would be almost incalculable.

Perhaps because of my own background I would tend to consider another aspect of the problem, namely, the rights of women under the law. There is no doubt that as a result of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, the government of Canada has succeeded in making substantial improvements in this field, at least in law, though I would be the first to admit that there is a very considerable distinction between law and practice. It has always been a conviction of mine that equal pay for equal work would resolve many of the problems relating to the status of women in this country. I have changed that opinion in recent months because I have seen too many instances where, while the law requires equality, reality in fact does not confer equality upon women. While I might disagree with some of the approaches of the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway as to the possibilities there might be for equality for women based upon an income for housewives, and so forth, at least I can agree with the principle involved, which is that the time has come to put an end to the economic distinctions we make in our society with respect to the status of women.

We can pass legislation providing that women should be allowed equal income for equal work, but in fact we find that women are not getting equal income for equal work. We can pass legislation, as we have in the province of Quebec from which I come, which in many regards has improved the status of women and taken it out of its relatively feudal state and brought it up to, perhaps 10 or 15 years ago, a state in law which is not too much criticized today. Changes have been made such that women who at one time were not able to make decisions affecting their families are now able to do so despite the absence of the husband or even despite his disagreement.

● (1750)

We could consider, for example, the right of women in the province of Quebec to determine what constitutes the best medical consultation in respect of themselves and their families. Again, this is something relatively new. I do not suggest, necessarily, that such reform of the existing legislation on the status of women has gone as far as it should go, but I would like to point out that the question of the status of women is improving with considerable speed.

On the subject of pensions as contained in Bill C-108 proposed by the hon. member for Waterloo-Cambridge, while I am in full agreement with the purpose of the bill, which I believe is to bring before this House the need to consider the economic status of women, I remain at the same time somewhat disturbed by many of the problems, some of which were referred to by the hon. member for Saint-Michel, which relate to an attempt simply to redefine a particular expression, in this case the word "employee" in the act.