

Government Orders

It is interesting to note that in 1986 women made up 56.1 per cent of all low income Canadians, compared to 57.3 per cent in 1981, emphasizing what I have just said: the feminization of poverty.

It is also interesting to note that only 16.5 per cent of female taxpayers or approximately 1.3 million women contributed to RRSPs in 1987, compared to 24.1 per cent of male tax filers or approximately 2.1 million. So there is a two to one ratio in this situation. This figure actually inflates the number of females who contributed to RRSPs because it is based on women who actually filed tax returns.

Women represented 39 per cent of the total number of RRSP contributors in 1987, contributing 32.8 per cent of the value, while men made up 61 per cent of contributors and held 67.2 per cent of the value of all RRSPs.

We know that women continue to earn considerably less than men. I think the figures show somewhere in the area of two-thirds of what a man makes and they cannot afford, in many cases, the luxury of contributing to a registered retirement savings plan.

Where is the fairness for women? It is a problem. I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the government that that problem could be partially solved by more fairness in the Canada Pension Plan and the old age security.

In a political context, let us look back at what has happened in the old age security bill, the clawback bill that I have referred to. I have also referred to the hypocrisy of the clawback.

A representative of the Canadian Council on Social Development said that we are starting to replace a progressive and visible benefits system with hidden subsidies that are in fact regressive. For example, we may eliminate the OAS, the old age security benefits, among higher income people but for the generation who will be seniors when this measure has its full impact, we are more than replacing them by increasing the limits on RRSP deductions and by putting in place a capital gains exemption. These kinds of measures provide high levels of subsidy, higher than the cut in old age security to high income people.

• (1720)

Once again I emphasize that we are not looking at solving the over-all problem. This government is reacting to political pressures of those who brought them

here. It obviously goes by the adage: "You dance with the one what brung ya". That is what is happening. The government is dancing to the tune played by those wealthy Canadians and wealthy corporations on an agenda that is bound to increase the problems within Canada as far as income levels go. As I said, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. That is what we are bound to if we continue down the path we have started with this government.

I cannot see that we have accomplished anything by helping those with higher incomes live beyond the wildest dreams of those with lower income levels in their retirement. That is what we are looking at in this particular bill. We are assisting those people with high incomes to continue to live in a style and in a manner that could not even be touched by most Canadians. That 5 per cent or less of Canadians seem to be controlling what is happening in Canada.

In conclusion, I simply say as a member of the New Democratic Party that I can see the value of registered retirement savings plans in the over-all scheme of things. I fully believe that we should be looking at what was fought for in 1926 with the old age security and the later Canada Pension Plan debates. We should be looking at a system that is fair for all Canadians, not just the Canadians who can afford to purchase that fairness. I believe that the government should look at that when it talks about fairness, flexibility and expansion of systems.

As this bill sits before this House I cannot support the it.

Mr. Jim Karpoff (Surrey North): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on this bill which is being called part of a pension reform package. I think the New Democratic Party has an honourable tradition in Canada of being the party that was probably the most instrumental in ensuring that pension schemes for the elderly were brought in. I would like to refer to one of the most distinguished people who worked for Canadians, who was talking about his hopes for the Canadian pension system.

What I like most of all about the Canadian pension plan, about the two-stage plan which we are now deploying for Canadians in their years of retirement, is that we are trying to reach a position where we are providing pensions that are adequate. I do not suggest that the levels which will be achieved by combining the Canada Pension Plan at its best with old age security at its present level are really the last words in adequacy. At least we are talking about pensions of quite a different