

Government Orders

We have taken notice of the government's assertion. An increase in the appropriate premiums of various individuals who are gainfully employed and who are not employed for this particular plan is important in order to make certain that the Canada pension fund itself is solvent and that we do not go bankrupt, thereby leaving a large number of Canadians without the appropriate compensation they thought they were going to receive.

The bill goes on to deal with the benefit levels for dependent children of disabled and deceased contributors to the plan. Federal-provincial agreement to such increases was reached I believe in January 1991, and we in this House are now cementing, consummating that agreement in its totality.

I want to say for the record that the increases which are tied in Bill C-39 are not whopping increases but are nevertheless increases. I think members ought to be cognizant of that increase and fully appreciate that those individuals who will be the recipients of these financial increases will certainly bear some benefit as a result.

I had hoped during report stage of this bill that amendments would have been allowed. Amendments were allowed by the Chair in terms of procedural grounds but certainly the substance of those amendments were not accepted by the government. That is a decision that every government duly elected by the people of Canada has a right to make. I think in this particular instance it has made this decision without sound substantive rationale.

I know the hon. member for Halifax West would want to participate in this debate. Perhaps we can hear from him later on. I do want to say there are some very perplexing situations that must be brought to the attention of the Chair, indeed the people of Canada, in terms of Bill C-39 and what it could have done. I have a number of cases in my own constituency where I make the comment that there are very sound and solid arguments for provisions of the Charter for discrimination both on sex and on age.

Bill C-39 could have incorporated some of those changes in order to rectify the problem.

I have a constituent who is a woman of 43 years of age who was receiving Canada pension benefits of \$215 per month after the death of her husband. One day her benefits were reduced to \$170 without any warning whatsoever. She found out that since health and welfare had not received confirmation that her son was still enrolled in school, she lost the benefits because he was no longer ruled as a dependent. I note that benefits cease for survivors when they reach the age of 18 and leave school or when they turn 25 if they remain in school.

This lady did not get her original benefits back even though the \$215 per month was reduced to begin with. This was simply because she was a woman under the age of 45 years. This is the point. That is in the legislation. That is unfair to Canadians who have to put up with that kind of difficulty.

Here is another situation. A woman became a widow in 1985. She applied twice for Canada pension benefits. That was in 1985 and 1988. She was refused both times because she was under the age of 35 and had no dependants. The case went before the Human Rights Commission. I say to the those in the Chamber and to those who are viewing our proceeding across the country that our Canadian Human Rights Commission said it would not interfere because it involved pension plans. Health and welfare on the other hand told this lady she would get her benefits when she reached 65.

The Chair has had a tremendous career. It is one known for reasonableness, fairness and at times firmness which is quite appropriate. I would have to ask the Chair and members through the Chair to explain to me and others where the fairness is. Surely this must be wrong. Surely there is something inherently wrong with the law.

In Bill C-39 we had an opportunity to correct that very grievous error but we did not. Members opposite voted us down and as a result it could not go forward.

Think of it. Let me personalize it just a little bit. You are 22 or 23 years of age and working and you make a decision to get married. You live together as man and wife and you make a conscious decision not to have any children until you pay your student loans.