

State Pensions

I have no preference as to which committee deals with this legislation, but I think there may be a procedural difficulty facing the House in trying to send a second piece of legislation to a committee which was originally set up with the limited power of considering a report dealing with staff. If we can continue on the present basis for tonight, and if that can be negotiated—and it will be agreed that there will not be a long debate on a motion to refer this particular legislation to the same joint committee—that would be fine, but at the moment I think it is impossible to accede to the suggestion made by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Madam Speaker, first I assure the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) that that committee is not yet *defunctus*. It will be around quite a while. In other words, the committee does exist, and this bill could be referred to it, but as I pointed out earlier when there was a motion before this House to set up that committee, the government House leader said that that committee would also deal with this bill. He has been asked about it several times, in public and in meetings of the House leaders. It has been agreed, and it is agreed tonight. If there needs to be another term of reference to satisfy the hon. member, perhaps that can be obtained, but I trust that the understanding we have had from the government all along will prevail.

The point is that the other committee is busy already and will be terribly busy when supplementary estimates are tabled, but the special joint committee on employer-employee relations is seized of problems relating to public servants, and I think we were all agreed that that was the place for this bill to go.

Mr. Sharp: Madam Speaker, I would just like to confirm that it was our understanding, in agreement with the House leaders of the various parties, that this bill could be referred to the joint committee. However, in order not to cause any interruption in the debate tonight, I would be quite happy to confirm this with the other House leaders, and I suggest that the debate continue this evening.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Morin): Is it agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Lloyd Francis (Parliamentary Secretary to President of Treasury Board): Madam Speaker—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Is a minister not going to speak on this bill?

Mr. Francis: On February 17 of this year the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Chrétien) moved for leave to introduce this omnibus bill containing amendments to the pension provisions of eleven statutes.

The major amendments which are contained in this bill are proposed by the government as a result of its consideration of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women which relate to the equality of status of females and males under the government's own pensions plans.

[Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West).]

Since the largest of those plans is the Public Service Superannuation Act, covering more than 250,000 federal public service employees, the government referred those recommendations of that royal commission to the Advisory Committee on the Public Service Superannuation Act and to the National Joint Council for consideration and advice. The proposals which were made to the government as a result of this consideration by these two bodies form the basis of the major amendments proposed in the Public Service Superannuation Act. These proposals, in turn, have been extended as appropriate to the amendments of the pension provisions of the other acts included in this omnibus bill in order to ensure the equality of status for male and female members which was sought.

The most noticeable effects of these proposed amendments will occur in those plans where there was a difference in the benefits available to female employees who in turn contributed a lower percentage of their salaries to the pension funds than did their male colleagues. Thus, on the contribution side, under the three superannuation acts for the civilian public service, the Canadian forces, and the RCMP, the rate for female employees will increase from a basic rate of 5 per cent to 6.5 per cent. This will make a total rate of 7 per cent of salary for both male and female members when one includes the one-half of 1 per cent contributed toward the cost of pension increases under the Supplementary Retirement Benefits Act and the amounts contributed to the Canada or Quebec Pension Plans.

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There are also amendments on the benefit side, with the major change being the provision of widowers' benefits on the deaths of female members.

New provisions are being introduced to increase the minimum benefits payable under these plans. This will apply to all members but will be of particular benefit to single employees and to those who are not entitled to an annuity benefit on termination of employment.

In the case of those ceasing to be employed after the legislation receives royal assent, the minimum benefit will be the greater of, first, a return of contributions with interest at 4 per cent from December 31 of 1973 and of each subsequent calendar year to December 31 of the year preceding cessation of employment, and, second, an amount equal to five years of annuity payments at the initial level which would have been payable to the employee if he qualified for an annuity on ceasing to be employed.

Also on the benefit side amendments are included to make it possible for participants in the supplementary death benefit plans which apply to members of the public service and Canadian forces, both male and female, to name the beneficiary of the death benefit. At the present time, the benefits are payable to the widow of a male participant and in all other cases to the estate of the participant. The royal commission's observation on this difference in treatment led to the recommendation by the advisory committee on the Public Service Superannuation Act which the government adopted, that, as with private life insurance policies, a participant should be able to name the beneficiary of the death benefit.