

Income Tax Act

We have calculated that the average net benefits to women with children will be increased by 22 per cent. If I may, I ask my colleagues to bring every pressure to bear on the government of Ontario, in particular, to drop its ban on a provision which will improve the lot of Canadian women vis-à-vis pensions in their own names.

● (1540)

[Translation]

Of course, these provisions are far from being perfect and they will not solve all the problems of women who have reached the age of retirement, but they will help to give them a reasonable pension. Some problems remain to be solved, namely, that of public pensions, which is readily identifiable, in particular the old age security income supplement for single people who have to apply for all or part of the supplement. About 75 per cent of these pensioners are women. Unfortunately, they are still below the poverty line in spite of the \$35 a month increase which has been granted since the cheque of last July, at the cost of something over \$500 million. I am of course talking about the old age security supplement for needy pensioners who are still below the poverty line. I simply want to emphasize that this aspect of the problems concerning pensions and women ought to be recognized. The cost of bringing all single pensioners above the poverty line, once and for all, if we could take this additional step today, would amount to approximately \$700 million. I cannot tell when we shall be able to do so, but it will certainly not be this year or in the immediate future, because of the economic conditions, but it will certainly be for us a priority as soon as our economy shows signs of recovery.

I simply wish to identify the problems thereby indicating that because of a lack of funds we are unable to consider immediate solutions. Another problem has to do with women between 60 and 65 who, because they are widowed or separated, do not benefit from the spouse's allowance, the special program for the spouses of pensioners, and who, because of a very legitimate pride, do not want to apply for provincial welfare assistance to which they are entitled. In my opinion, this problem can be solved only by implementing a guaranteed annual income or a pension for people in need, not only for women, but for all people between 60 and 65 who are in need. To implement such a program or to bring about another definition of poverty would mean nearly \$1 billion in additional expenses. This is why I would consider it dishonest on my part to give any hope of such a program being implemented in the near future. We want first of all to bring above the poverty line those over 65, and then we can determine how best to attack the problems of needy men and women under 65 who are not yet entitled to official retirement benefits. In any case, the hon. members are aware that the problem of pensions will be at the heart of the debate on social policies and their improvement in the eighties.

Last week, or ten days ago, we announced that a national conference on pensions will be held at the end of March, to which will be invited the main parties concerned in private pension plans in Canada, that is, representatives of employers in the small business sector, of provincial, municipal and federal governments in their capacity as employers and legislators, and other interested parties, not only management but also the workers, the unions and women's groups as well as groups of retired people. They are the only ones who have a first-hand knowledge of the weaknesses in our pension system because they suffer from them in their daily lives. I would also add that the situation of women who work without pay, that is housekeepers, is just as deplorable. Much can be said about improving their lot. This bill only tackles one aspect of their problem, but no more can be done for the time being. Generally speaking, despite the passage of time and the will to solve that old problem, working women are still locked in the lowest-paid jobs and their presence in the work force tends to be sporadic, at least during child-bearing and child-rearing years before their children start attending daycare centres and school regularly.

[English]

Before I conclude, Mr. Speaker, let me mention two other provisions of this bill which relate directly to my portfolio of National Health and Welfare. Before doing that, it has just come to my mind what the hon. member for Edmonton West may have been referring to. He and other members of this House have requested the improvement which is taking place today. I mentioned one group of women in particular because I think we owe them credit for the constant work and pressure and the presentation of briefs they have made toward this improvement, and that is the work of AFEAS. The hon. member for York South-Weston (Mrs. Appoloni) as well as, I suppose, the hon. member for Edmonton West who, for the short time his party was in power, expressed the same intent.

An hon. Member: We were defeated.

Miss Bégin: You could have done it before that but you did not. Hon. members had expressed the same recognition of this injustice in the Income Tax Act. This will be settled with Bill C-54, and all of us are very pleased about that.

There are two other measures in Bill C-54 that relate in part to my ministerial responsibility. One measure has to do with an amendment to the child tax credit provisions which will ensure that the credit received in a given year will go in as many cases as possible to the person currently looking after the child.

In the first two years of its existence the child tax credit has proved, and I think I have the concurrence of everybody on that, to be extremely successful in delivering a measure of financial assistance to low and middle-income families raising children. Millions of mothers are in the process right now of filing their 1980 tax returns to claim a non-taxable benefit, and I insist this time on a non-taxable benefit of up to \$238