

ward in the recognition of the place of those who work in the home. As if it is not enough to have heard the parliamentary secretary read those words from a speech that had been prepared for the minister, the minister now has the gall to applaud, when I quote those words. It does no such thing. This bill slightly recognizes that there are women who work in the home, and that because of that they should be given some very slight recognition. To call it a major step forward is really a misuse of language.

The bill, in that respect, proposes to do two things. The supporting material the department has put out makes it very clear that neither of these steps is going to cost very much, which means, in effect, that there is not much to it. The bill does two things.

Mr. Lalonde: It is divided between the two.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): It does two things with respect to spouses. It does a number of other things which are housekeeping details. It is interesting that the word "housekeeping" got into this bill when we are talking about spouses. That is an aside. It does two things in so far as spouses are concerned. First, it provides, in the event of marriage breakdown, provided the marriage lasted for three years, that the combined assets can be split between the two parties. The bill goes into a lot of detail as to how that can be done, depending upon when the marriage breakdown took place, when the divorce was completed, the age of children, and so on.

At any rate, that is one thing the bill does. It combines the total value of the assets of husband and wife and splits those assets 50-50, if there is dissolution of the marriage, after that marriage has lasted three years. We accept that and we will support it. We think it is a good idea. We think it is some recognition, but only an infinitesimal recognition, of the fact that the spouse who stayed at home has made some contribution to the economic well-being of that family unit.

The other thing it does is to make a slight change with respect to women who are contributors. I say women, knowing that the bill works both ways, and I should talk about spouses. It could be a woman or a man. But in 90 per cent or more of the cases the bill is dealing with the mother—the woman. In that sense, the bill provides that if a woman has been a contributor already, and then stays home for a few years to raise children, provided those children are not over the age of seven the years spent doing that can be dropped out of the years that are involved in the calculation of her retirement benefit when she reaches age 65.

● (1640)

The hon. member for Hamilton West seemed to be worried about some element of subsidy. I find it awfully hard to see any element of subsidy. It is not giving anybody anything new. It just says to certain women who stay home to raise children that under the law as it stood we took away some of the rights they had earned, but we will give back those rights because the reason for staying home was to rear children. There is nothing

Canada Pension Plan

whatsoever in this provision in this legislation for the woman, the spouse, the wife, the mother who stays home the whole of her married life or was a contributor for a while and never goes back to the labour force. We are asked to believe that this is a major step forward in recognizing the work in the home, but it applies only to a limited number of cases.

As far as that great number of Canadian women—even in this modern day I suggest there are many of them—who play the role of wife, mother and homemaker and do not go out to work, there is nothing whatsoever for them. For the government to try and tell us that this is a move in the direction of recognizing the role of work in the home in sheer nonsense.

I am going to support this bill even though I have called it nonsense. It is a very halting step in the direction of admitting that there are times when women, by their work in the home, earn some economic recognition, some economic rights. However, I want that to go all the way. Let us not wait until the year 2000 or 2100 before we carry the principle of equal rights for men and women all the way.

We have in this legislation, in veterans' legislation, in the pensions that widows get from the Canada Pension Plan, or from working for the CNR or the federal government, the concept that a woman gets only what she is entitled to because she had a husband, because of her attachment to a male person. What about granting to women rights in their own stead? I suggest that the time has come, not just to do the simple little thing that is proposed in this amendment to the Canada Pension Plan, but to recognize in full the role that is performed by women who stay home, raise children, look after the household and the family that in that way help to keep the nation going. This bill does not do that. It does not even recognize it.

Excuses are offered. The main excuse offered for not putting it into this legislation is that the Canada Pension Plan is an employment-related pension scheme. I fully recognize that. I was around when we were putting together the Canada Pension Plan. I feel a certain responsibility for it and a certain pride in it. It is one of the best pension plans to be found anywhere as far as the citizens of a whole country are concerned. Therefore, I accept that it is an employment-related pension plan.

If we were to break that by giving pensions where no employment or no employment earnings are involved, we would then be producing a totally different scheme. The minister is no doubt aware that a good many times I have asked him questions in this area and a good many times I have moved motions under Standing Order 43. I think he will admit that my questions and motions have always been carefully worded. I have not proposed that women who stay at home should get benefits under the Canada Pension Plan as though they were employed and had earnings. I have proposed that they should be given pension rights equivalent to those that are given to those who work and contribute to the Canada Pension Plan.

The various committees that have studied this have come up with the answer that it cannot be done under an employment-