

Government Orders

Mr. Manley: Mr. Speaker, I certainly made my position clear in my speech. I do not think this member was present for that part. Maybe if we could get the NDP caucus all together at once we could have a discussion about it. What clearly has not been stated is what the NDP position is. I do not think we are accomplishing anything by this, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Burnaby): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry that when I looked at the clock a few moments ago I thought we were back on Bill C-55, so I apologize to you. I do want to speak on Bill C-55.

It is, as I said earlier, legislation which I have examined very carefully. It is, in fact, almost an omnibus bill. It deals with so many components of federal pensions that it really would have been better, I feel, if the government had split this bill into its different components so we could deal with it in those components.

There are a number of features in this bill that I support and I know that other members of my caucus support. Finally, after years and years of lobbying, federal part-time workers, if this bill becomes law, will be able to become part of the federal superannuation plans. I am sure most of us in this House are aware this is a benefit which will proportionately mean more to women than it does to men because a larger number of women are working on a part-time basis and not in full-time jobs.

This bill also provides for an early retirement act for correctional workers. That is another suggestion that has been made in this House for at least 10 years, another situation for which we have lobbied for a long time. Correctional workers have very stressful jobs and they deserve the kind of unreduced early retirement plan that air traffic controllers have had for some time now.

Another provision in this bill that I support is the new Pension Benefits Division Act which instructs the federal government to enforce court ordered divisions of federal pension credits upon marital breakdown. This idea was also a very long time coming. In fact, since I was elected in 1988 I have been working on this issue. I have received representations from a number of women who have been married to plan holders and have lost totally the benefits they should be entitled to because of the way the previous act was written.

I am afraid there is still a number of problems with the method the government has chosen in its attempt to address this inequality for women in this very large bill. I heard the parliamentary secretary saying earlier today that this is a simple bill that brings pension legislation in line with the Income Tax Act. I would ask the parliamentary secretary why on earth do we have a bill with 153 pages dealing with so many aspects of pension legislation, including the pensions of members of Parliament, which it seems to have just kind of snuck in there?

I would respond also to the Liberal member who was speaking a moment ago that the leader of the New Democratic Party made the position of the New Democratic Party straight and clear when she spoke in the House at second reading. That is the position of the New Democratic Party. There are concerns in this caucus, and within this party, around the provisions of double-dipping and triple-dipping that we know has gone on. We know that the public shares those concerns. There are concerns around the age at which a member is entitled to start to receive pension benefits. Those are the concerns she articulated. She articulated them clearly and this is the position of the New Democratic Party.

I said a few moments ago that I had some concerns with the bill in relation to the pension splitting provisions. Women are living in poverty unnecessarily because of this government's policy on pensions. This bill will only ensure that women who can jump through a number of bureaucratic hoops from now on will get a part of the pension to which they are entitled. It does not do anything for the many women who are retired or approaching retirement after a lifetime of work in their homes. They remain, in fact, doomed to poverty under this new legislation.

What I am talking about here is spouses of contributors to the government's own pension plan, from Public Service employees, Armed Forces personnel, diplomatic service, et cetera. Since 1987, the federal government has required federally-regulated industries to adopt certain pension standards which include pension credit splitting on marriage breakdown. The federal government has exempted itself from the Pension Benefit Standards Act and continues to set a lower standard for itself than for federally regulated industries.