

● (1130)

I must say, Mr. Speaker, in reviewing the response I felt in a sense that it was a classic response of a Conservative Party. I was pleasantly surprised by a number of the very progressive responses and by two important recommendations of the committee. In a number of other key areas I was disappointed that the conservative element of the caucus and, indeed, of the Cabinet was triumphant.

It was progressive and it was conservative in the best traditions, as I say, of that Party, a Party that on the one hand, through the Right Hon. John Diefenbaker, brought forward the first Canadian Bill of Rights, and on the other hand, a Party which has in too many areas been afraid to move forward on questions of fundamental social justice. I imagine that the debates within the Cabinet committee room were fierce and bloody on many of these issues of fundamental social justice.

I want to say without hesitation that if my reading of the recommendations is accurate—and like my colleague the Hon. Member for Mount Royal (Mrs. Finestone) I received the report about only one hour ago—then certainly the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) himself deserves considerable credit in the area of social justice for having moved forward on a number of controversial and key recommendations of our committee.

I note it was the Prime Minister who said that because we are children of liberty it is up to us to protect the cause of human rights and minorities wherever they are challenged. Challenge they are, whether it be in the Cabinet room or in caucus rooms, and I know it must have taken considerable effort, strength and determination on the part of a number of individuals, and I suspect the Prime Minister in the area of several of these more controversial recommendations, in getting that kind of consensus that we were looking for. The dinosaurs in the Tory caucus are not dancing today. The dinosaurs in the Tory caucus are deeply concerned about a number of the recommendations that have been made.

All of us in this House deeply hope there will never be combat, but with respect to women and the Armed Forces it is essential that all women have full access to all trades and occupations within the Armed Forces. Despite the fact that the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Nielsen) appeared before the sub-committee and bitterly resisted those recommendations, I am pleased the Government as a whole has overruled him and apparently, at least, is prepared to open all trades and occupations to women. We welcome that, although we certainly express our concern about some of the qualifications that appear to be there.

With respect to the area of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, certainly the statement made in the report appears to be clear and unequivocal. The Government states it will take whatever measures necessary to ensure that sexual orientation is a prohibitive ground of discrimination in relation to all areas of federal jurisdiction.

Statements by Ministers

I assume the Government means what it says there, and what the Government hopefully will do, and do immediately, is to put an end to the discriminatory policies within the RCMP and the Canadian Armed Forces which have caused such pain, hardship and oppression to Canadian men and women. If that is the intent of these recommendations, we welcome them.

One of the Conservative dinosaurs says "Don't hold your breath." That is what we are concerned about, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps the dinosaurs are still attempting to defeat the will of this Government. "Don't hold your breath", the Member said. There are thousands of Canadians who believe the time has come to put an end to discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. I hope the Government will take immediate action on the recommendations as it indicates it will.

Equality for all must be a reality. In the economic sphere, the response of the Government falls short. Women continue to be denied equality whether it be in the area of pensions, part-time work, equal pay for work of equal value, employment equity or child care. What about the women in the Armed Forces who continue to be denied adequate maternity benefits as a result of the response of the Government? The disabled, visible minorities and native people still are not adequately protected in the area of employment protection under the employment equity provisions. It is not good enough to suggest, as the Government has done in its response, that the reporting requirements of Bill C-62 are sufficient to ensure compliance. That approach has been rejected over and over again by the groups who have been hit hardest.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, while we are happy about a number of recommendations, especially in the social sphere, I find it regrettable that there are still too many studies and not enough action by this Government.

Mr. Speaker, equality must be equality for all, not just for those who can afford it.

Of course, there was a serious confrontation in Cabinet and even in the Caucus. Mr. Speaker, the report fails to grant women equality in the areas I mentioned earlier, and especially with respect to pensions, part-time work and employment equity.

Mr. Speaker, I also may point out that equality rights for visible minorities and the handicapped have yet to be granted.

[*English*]

Our committee worked together and heeded the views, the voices and the concerns of Canadians across this land calling for equality, calling for an end to discrimination on the grounds set out in Section 15 and on the grounds implicit in that section. We said it was essential that Canadians not be forced into the courts to make that equality a reality. While the steps taken by the Government today represent an important first step in a number of key areas, certainly with respect to the fundamental area of economic justice, the Government still has not moved far enough.