

Adjournment Debate

it is important that all hon. members realize how strong the criticism was of an advisory body appointed by this government. Mrs. Rousseau began her remarks with this paragraph:

After considerable study, consultation and discussion, I have come to a tragic conclusion: not only are Canadian women excluded from the employment strategy proposed by the Canadian government, but they are subtly evicted from the labour force. This conclusion is all the more bitter in that it questions women's right to work. After ten years of in depth studies, conclusive research and multiple recommendations, such are the facts.

At page 3 of her text she went on to say:

But when we dissect official statements made in time of economic ill-health, we are appalled to see that women are consistently held responsible for the high rate of unemployment, though they fall victims to it more than other groups. Consequently, they are used as scapegoats and as a screen for a chronic inability to redress the economy.

She then raised two questions not yet answered by the Prime Minister or by the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Cullen), as follows:

Before it was decided to exclude women from the employment strategy, why is it that the CACSW's advice was not asked? Is an advisory council a political ornament? Are there any women on the regional working groups advising Canada Employment and Immigration Commission's sector task forces?

On the next page she asked:

Why are they always ignored in policy planning?

● (2215)

She was referring here to the role of women. In the latter part of her remarks she said:

If government does not know its own objectives, or does not make them known, we know what our objectives are: women's right to training, to work and to employment mobility on an equal footing with men.

Then there is this further question:

Is our role as Advisory Council on the Status of Women recognized, or will the government take our advice only when faced with emergency situations?

I want to remind all hon. members that the criticism that was posed by the president of the Advisory Council did not come lightly. It follows numerous official comments and statements made in recent years. I just want to list three or four that I have before me this evening. Hon. members will recall that on April 10, 1978, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Chrétien) in his budget statement said:

An important reason for the growth of our labour force has been the growing number of Canadian women who are working. Since 1970, the number of adult women in the labour force has increased from 1.9 million to 2.7 million, a rise of more than 40 per cent.

Then on September 8, 1978, detailing the announcements by the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Andras), the so called Chrétien-Andras statement of that date said:

The strong gains in employment have been matched by continued rapid increases in the labour force as a result of the continued increase in the proportion of women and young people seeking work. Thus the unemployment rate averaged 8.5 per cent over the first half of the year, although it dropped to 8.4 per cent in July.

Then the Prime Minister's comments this year, first on the program "Question Period" televised by CTV on September 8, 1978, in which he said:

There was about 36 per cent of the women working three years ago and now there is 42 per cent of them. But this phenomenon will stabilize at one time . . .

[Mr. MacDonald (Egmont).]

The same thing with the youth problem . . . You know, we're creating and I think we're quite successful in creating jobs but I have to admit that we cannot create them as fast as the people come into the labour force.

Finally at the end of the year on September 28, 1978, in a conversation with Bruce Phillips broadcast by CTV, the Prime Minister said:

—the labour force is increasing because of immigration, immigration to Canada, because of what is called participation rate which really means that the percentage of young people and women who want to work now is immensely higher than it was ten or 15 or 20 years ago.

People want to enter the labour force, and they see that that is their answer, O.K., you will have eight per cent unemployed.

Then the Solicitor General (Mr. Blais) on January 29, 1979, in speaking to an international symposium on female offenders, said:

In addition, increased opportunities for women in the labour force brought increased opportunities to engage in a wider range of criminal pursuits.

If there was any doubt about the feeling of either the advisory council or its six parallel bodies, that should have been put to rest on January 29 when a letter was sent to the Minister of Employment and Immigration on behalf of the six provincial bodies and the federal body which says:

Dear Mr. Cullen:

At a special meeting of the leaders of the Advisory Councils on the Status of Women of Canada, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Ontario and Saskatchewan held in Toronto, January 26, 1979, there was unanimous endorsement of Yvette Rousseau's position that "not only are Canadian women excluded from the employment strategies proposed by the federal government, but they are subtly evicted from the labour force."

That, along with the extensive letter which indicated in detailed terms the anxieties and questions which these advisory bodies had, should let the government know in no uncertain terms the atmosphere which they have created with their subtle and sometimes not so subtle attack on the right of women to a place in the labour force.

To put the other side of the case, a recent report from the C.D. Howe Research Institute, as quoted by Don McGillivray in a recent article, suggested this:

What will it mean for the Canadian economy if women keep joining the paid work force at the rapid rate of the past couple of years?

The pessimistic answer is that it will mean more unemployment. The optimistic answer is that it will mean more economic growth.

What we need from this government is a more positive response to the right of each and every woman to her desire to a full share and an equal opportunity in the market place.

Miss Aileen Nicholson (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member who has just spoken and the chairman of the Advisory Committee on the Status of Women share positive and real concern about the place of women in the labour force. But perhaps what they have both done is to misunderstand some government statements. What has been said by ministers, as the hon. member has quoted, is that the participation of women in the labour force has increased very dramatically. This is a fact. It is not a matter of blame, it is a fact. It is a fact which I welcome. I certainly agree with him and with the very positive approach by the C. D. Howe people that