

Statements by Ministers

Mrs. Finestone: That is fine, but where is the amendment? All the Government said is that it is considering the amendment. I did not see, nor has it been written that you are going to present it. You are only going to study it.

The Canadian Human Rights Act should be amended and you have not gone through that amendment. You are studying how to amend it. You have had 14, 18, 20 months to amend it.

I would like to suggest that the "normal" age of retirement as an argument is no longer valid as a defence of the rule of thumb for anyone anymore. Hon. Members on this side of the House are ready to fight for the right of older people to contribute to our society and our country for as long as they are able to contribute. One cannot judge a person's worth based on the factor of age, and that sort of equality has no place in Canada's work ethics. Certainly, women and youth are not the ones who are going to ask you to be concerned about discriminating on age.

On maternity and parental benefits, again there are delays, considerations, studies and inquiries. The Liberal Party believes that we have had enough of these things. The Canadian Human Rights Commission recommended that the Unemployment Insurance Act be amended to ensure that that portion of maternity leave relating to social adjustment or infant care be available to either parent. I really would like to see the Government enforce that recommendation.

As I went through the documents, and I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, is that from my reading, what the Minister has said on sexual orientation is absolutely unacceptable. It leaves it totally up to the courts at this particular moment. Referred to our committee was a Private Members' Bill presented by the Hon. Member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson). I did not see the Minister take action on that Bill. Every brief we heard from people across this land asked for changes on sexual orientation. There is harassment and discrimination whether it be by the RCMP or, the Department of National Defence or industry. Discrimination exists. To deny that reality by talking about security clearance problems for gays is just to avoid the issue and refusing to face your responsibilities.

With respect to women in combat ready roles, the Minister said he is going to look at it in the "interests of national security". All the Minister had to do was to attend the meetings we had with the Deputy Minister who represents the Department of National Defence and listen to the regressive chauvinistic *misogyny* attitudes to know that that is absolutely ridiculous. In the interests of national security, you are not going to do very much for women in the Armed Forces. It is my Party's belief that sexual discrimination within the Armed Forces is intolerable. Female participation does not have the potential for adverse social and sexual relationships which were alluded to. There is no justification in keeping women out of a paid workforce such as the Armed Forces. Those beliefs were not valid then and they are not valid now. To deny women who wish to serve their country the right to combat ready roles is to deny them the right of valuable training, education and promotion as equal citizens in this land.

The 65 per cent occupation rate open to women which you have talked about, Mr. Minister, leads me to look—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I have not wanted to interrupt because I know the Hon. Member is a relatively new Member of Parliament, but I must caution her about all these references.

Mrs. Finestone: You are right, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you. The 65 per cent rate of occupations which are available to women in the Armed Forces resembles the 64 cent to 65 per cent dollar which women are paid in the market place today. I would suggest to you that that inequity needs to be dealt with.

With respect to employment equity, I know quite well that the Government is very proud of Bill C-62, but that Bill will not meet the intended goal of equal opportunities for the handicapped, visible minorities, native people or women. A law which has no mandatory enforcement mechanism is a law with no teeth. For the Minister to come out with a ministerial citation for excellence instead of mandatory operation and enforcement mechanisms is just a laugh. It is a law with no effective force outside of moral suasion.

It is regrettable that the amendments so carefully proposed and considered by my colleagues fell on the deaf ears of our Tory legislators. The grounds really leave me very despondent and upset. I cannot believe that we are looking at a report of this nature which has not dealt with all of the issues in an open and meaningful way. I sincerely hope that the Government will give it some reconsideration as we go through this report and make our observations. I hope that somewhere along the way the difficult task which our committee had to face in reconciling the monumental difficulties which minority people presented to us, the discrimination under which they have to live, will be rectified sooner rather than later. But it is not with this report that we will realize that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to congratulate my fellow members on the Committee of Equality Rights and emphasize that it was thanks to the efforts of Canadian men and women, of groups and individuals across Canada, that the Committee was able to formulate its unanimous recommendations.

[*English*]

I should like to emphasize as well that it was Tommy Douglas who in 1947 introduced in Canada the first Bill of Rights. Since then, my colleagues in the CCF and in the New Democratic Party, have fought hard for civil liberties and fundamental human rights. Indeed, in reviewing the response of the Government today, headed toward equality, to the unanimous recommendations of the subcommittee on equality rights, it is in that historical tradition and spirit of seeking full equality for all Canadians, in particular those Canadians who have been denied equality, that we approach these recommendations.