

Statements by Ministers

I invite the Conservative Government and all the Members of this House to reflect on this and to support this fight as it will make the lives of each one of us better.

● (1220)

[English]

Ms. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): Mr. Speaker, we in the New Democratic Party join in the tribute to the outstanding Canadian women who pioneered the fight for equality and who won the right for us to be recognized as persons 56 years ago.

We warmly congratulate the women who received Persons Awards last night on behalf of many Canadian women. In particular, we congratulate Grace Hartman, Marguerite Bergeron-Tremblay, Nazla Dane, Evelyn O'Bomsawin-Lamirande, Gemma Pelletier-Caron and Pearl Steen.

Women continue to struggle for a better life for themselves, for their sisters, and for their daughters. We have learned that change will not come as a gift. We must continue to speak out against injustices, demand equal opportunities, and organize so that many voices will be heard.

Canada did play an important role at the UN Decade of Women Conference held in Nairobi, where forward-looking strategies were adopted to guide us to the year 2000.

Women in Canada cannot achieve equality in a vacuum. We must join with our sisters and brothers around the world to achieve equality, peace, and development.

But the starting place to achieve these goals is right here at home. We have now achieved a Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but now test cases must be litigated. Women are disappointed that the Government has ignored their requests for direct financing for Charter litigation cases. This funding is essential to ensure independent selection and timing and to win these test cases on behalf of women generally.

Economic equality is basic to the resolution of all inequalities facing women. Feminization of poverty has escalated; older women are destitute. And the Government's answer is to cut the indexation of social benefits, and in particular the indexation of family allowances.

Some Hon. Members: Shameful; shameful!

Ms. Mitchell: Canadian women still earn only 60 per cent of the salaries of men. They carry double burdens at home and in the workplace. They work primarily in underpaid job ghettos and are now being forced more and more into part-time jobs.

Regrettably, the Government has ignored many of the recommendations of the Abella Commission, which proposed mandatory employment equity in the federal sector. Voluntary programs with no enforcement mechanisms will not achieve the reforms which women demand as their right.

To achieve equal opportunities in the workplace, women also must have accessible and affordable daycare. We look forward to early and positive action in this area, as was promised by the Progressive Conservative Government.

Mr. Speaker, the Nairobi experience reminded us that practical development programs operated by and for women are essential, both here at home and in developing countries. Poor women, immigrant women, farm women, northern women and battered women must have access to resources and mutual help if they are to overcome the difficult burdens that they carry.

Madam Margareta Papandreou, who headed the Greek delegation in Nairobi, moved us all when she said:

We women are a rising force in society. We must fill the ranks of the worldwide mass peace movement and we must at the same time move into the centres of decision-making where our voices, where our instincts for protecting life, where our concern for human rights can become the dominant forces in affecting the future of the planet and the future of humanity.

Mr. Speaker, the women of Canada are not merely persons. We are people with passion, pride and increasing power to work for a better world.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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PETITIONS

CHANGES TO FAMILY ALLOWANCE PROGRAM

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex-Windsor): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition which follows appropriately on the comments just made by my colleague, the Hon. Member for Vancouver East (Ms. Mitchell). It is the petition of 306 people in Essex county and Windsor, from the following communities: Windsor, Amherstburg, Oldcastle, Tecumseh, Essex, Woodslee, Cottam, Belle River, Kingsville, Maidstone, Leamington, Emeryville, Lasalle, Puce, McGregor, Ruthven, St. Clair Beach, and Harrow.

In each case, the petitioners are conveying their stern sense of opposition to the changes being undertaken by this Government to the Family Allowance Program. They are putting in a call for tax fairness as an alternative.

FULL INDEXATION OF FAMILY ALLOWANCE PROGRAM

Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, my petition is also very appropriate on this day, Persons Day. It relates to family allowances. In their petition the people say that the cut-back in family allowances and the tax increases are inequitable and unbearable in the face of budget hand-outs such as a half a million dollars in tax-free capital gains, greater RRSP deductions for high-income recipients, billions of dollars in hand-outs to the oil companies, and a \$1 billion bail-out of the banks.

Mr. Speaker, the people presenting this petition humbly pray and call upon the House of Commons to reinstate the full indexation of universal family allowance and to rescind the unfair tax increases.

Mr. Speaker, this is obviously something that should be done on Persons Day.