

First, in the brief time I have available I wish to speak about the process which led to the establishment of this fund. There was an excellent proposal made by a very respected organization in Canada. I am referring to the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, a group which represents women from right across Canada.

[Translation]

The Women's Legal Education and Action Fund has carefully examined how the money should be spent to defend equality rights. In the opinion not only of this Fund but also of the New Democratic Party, it is essential that women should be able to choose among significant issues and decide on which to take action, as well as use the money as they see fit, and not as others might see fit.

That is why the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund has applied for financial assistance from the Government of Canada. It has a very specific purpose, Mr. Speaker. It applied for a grant of \$20 million.

This amount would yield some \$2 million in interests per annum, which is exactly what is required by a small organization the purpose of which is to defend public interests. And the Fund has emphasized that it is often necessary to go to courts to have the guarantees of the Charter enforced.

● (1530)

[English]

A concrete proposal was put forward for funding. What happened? Not once, not twice, but 13 different times they tried to talk to someone in Government—anyone; the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Hnatyshyn), the Secretary of State (Mr. Bouchard), the Minister of Justice, but no one would talk to them. This is the Government which prides itself on consultation. So much for consultation, Mr. Speaker. There has been no consultation whatsoever on this important question.

Had the Government consulted, Mr. Speaker, it would have found that this proposal is fundamentally unacceptable. It is a proposal which is a slap in the face to those groups who most hoped for action on equality, on the woman's movement, on the disabled, on visible minorities and other minorities. It is a paternalistic approach and one which denies the equality which Government is supposed to be promoting.

As Shelagh Day of the Legal Education and Action Fund said:

Once more, women are going to have decisions made for them by others. The point of equal rights at this particular time, you would think, would be to give women power to make decisions for themselves and to honor their capacity to do that. This is not a good equal-rights decision.

We echo that concern, Mr. Speaker, which has been expressed as well by representatives of the disabled and the ethnic communities in Canada, including the Canadian Ethnocultural Council.

I emphasize, Mr. Speaker, that we are not opposed to the principle of an independent arm's length agency which would

have the power and, I might say, adequate funds to assist in funding important challenges under the provisions of the Charter of Rights. However, we say that the two principles are not exclusive. One can have a respected independent agency such as the Canadian Council for Social Development involved in funding decisions and, at the same time, recognize that it is women who should be determining priorities for women, that it is the disabled who should be determining priorities for the disabled, and that it is the representatives of minorities who should be determining their priorities, not others on their behalf.

Mr. Crosbie: We agree.

Mr. McLean: We agree. That is exactly what they've done.

Mr. Robinson: The Government says it agrees, Mr. Speaker. Yet it is bringing forward a proposal which flies in the face of that fundamental principle.

Mr. Crosbie: Narrow-minded McCarthyism.

Mr. Robinson: The New Democratic Party believes—and we will hear from the braying Minister of Justice in due course—that the amount of money which has been allocated for this fund—

Mr. Crosbie: I'm not allowed to speak here because the loud-mouthed NDP are hogging the floor.

Mr. Robinson: —is not adequate.

Ms. Mitchell: The unjust Justice Minister.

Mr. Robinson: The Legal Education and Action Fund estimated that it would cost some \$2 million a year merely to pursue the very serious and historic inequities against women. This program would allocate \$2 million for all court challenges, including challenges under the provisions of language rights. The structure which is proposed, Mr. Speaker, is awkward. It will result in delays and in reviews on a case-by-case basis and not on a priority basis.

In fact, as Mary Eberts, a chairperson of the Legal Committees of the Women's Action Fund, said:

The potential for the whole thing to become bogged down is really quite substantial. I'm convinced the method is guaranteed to slow down the pace of litigation to that of a snail.

Justice delayed is justice denied, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Dick: Where did you hear that before?

Mr. Robinson: And justice has been denied to Canadian women, to the disabled and to other minority groups for far too long. We in this Party believe that the establishment of a fund or funds is long overdue, and while the resources must be beefed up, we are most disappointed with the failure of this Government to consult with the groups affected and to bring forward recommendations which would have responded in a