

*Status of Women*

part of a viable base for true equality within our society. Earlier I mentioned the International Women's Year media campaign on the status of women. Sometimes I think it is possible for us to lose touch with the very real concerns of women in Canada, and yet one of the most gratifying results of this media campaign was the hundreds of letters received from women and men across the country. I would like to just quickly read from several of them. One of them was addressed to "The People of this Organization". It read:

I really agree with you. Women are people too and are to be recognized among their community and country as basketball players, politicians, lawyers, doctors, store managers, construction workers and matadors. Not only as secretaries, playboy bunnies, typists and sex objects.

I am only 12 years old but I am not dumb and I realize the work and responsibility nearly every woman has.

From British Columbia we received a long letter from a woman in her mid-fifties, who ended with this story:

My husband being between jobs, I took work as housekeeper-nurse to an old, aristocratic man. During the interview he was shocked to hear that besides feeding the three of us, he was expected to pay me the fee of \$100 per month. "I never paid my wife", he said. "I used to take her to tea once a month. Which I am willing to do with you." This man was the epitome of male supremacy. He thought all females should deem it an honour to wait on him hand and foot. Hooray for Why Not! Too late for me. But I have daughters.

Another, again from a young girl:

Please tell me why a girl can't go into training to become a bank manager. I've approached two different banks in Lethbridge, Alberta. They laugh at me for even thinking of such a ridiculous career for girls. Why can't we be managers as well as men? Isn't this discrimination?

These letters are samples of hundreds received. It is only fair to add that not all have been positive, but the vast majority have been warm and positive.

Women's equality is not an esoteric issue. The prejudice that continues to exist has very real consequences for women in this country. While individual choice is considered a basic democratic freedom, it is evident that "choices" are still often arbitrarily limited for women. It must be the personal commitment of each woman and man in our society to work for the creation of equal choices, equal rights, equal opportunities and equal responsibilities. Ingrained prejudice and fear will only disappear when all people in our society are convinced that anything less than equality is an affront to human dignity.

**Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition):** Mr. Speaker, along with the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) I had expected at one point this week to be on my feet in this House speaking on the budget debate, but the Minister of Finance has seen fit to defer that particular pleasure for me. My keen disappointment in respect of the delay of the budget is somewhat tempered by the fact that today we are dealing with this omnibus bill concerning equality of status for men and women. This bill has been around for over seven months in this new parliament. I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak to it and to respond to the minister this afternoon. I regret that the powers that be have seen fit to schedule some five House committees to meet while the debate on this important subject is going on. I think that further thought might be given to that sort of thing in the future.

[Mr. Lalonde.]

• (1550)

Both my male colleague, the hon. member for Fundy-Royal (Mr. Fairweather), and my female colleague, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald), have special responsibilities and interests in this bill and its subject matter and it is only because of their necessary absence from the House on other business which took them out of the city that I am afforded the opportunity this afternoon of replying to the minister. In some respects, I cannot help but feel a little bit like Edward Heath might feel doing Margaret Thatcher's laundry. I am sure he would feel he could not do it nearly as well. But that, after all, is an essential feeling to be experienced on the road toward equality of the sexes and I approach this job this afternoon with both pride and relish.

[Translation]

It is but rarely I have the opportunity to take part in a debate with the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde). We do meet casually from time to time to have a hamburger or a milkshake together, but it is so infrequent. It's a manner of speaking, nothing more. But, apart from those food issues, some might say that a steady diet from the minister will make you sick. I am not prepared to support automatically the ideas of his friends from the right wing of the Cabinet.

[English]

The minister has presented an omnibus bill today which proposes a number of changes in various statutes designed "to provide equality of status thereunder for male and female persons." With regard to many of these items, this omnibus bill represents what you might call a tidying-up operation. The bill changes the form of the language in other bills. I am not suggesting for a moment that these are not important changes, but in three areas the bill makes very significant changes: in respect of pensions, in respect of cadet services, and in respect of unemployment insurance maternity benefits. The minister covered the various aspects of the bill in some detail and I will not use the time of the House to repeat the sort of analysis that he has made.

So far as the bill goes, it is welcome. I am sure the minister will not be offended; he will probably agree with me when I say it is long overdue. In the context of the problems with which it is associated, while it is certainly necessary it is far from sufficient. So far as the general subject of the status of women is concerned, the minister, as one might have expected, endeavoured to create an impression of considerable encouragement. I want to be fair to him. He certainly indicated that there was a great deal to be done, but that progress had been rather limited. He indicated that perhaps some other countries had done rather better than we had. However, I do not find this quite as encouraging as he did.

When I look at the realities that present themselves, particularly when I think of what the government, as a government, is proposing to do and this parliament will be asked to do, without in any way wishing to suggest that the minister is indulging in any misrepresentation I simply ask the House to consider the possibility that in this instance his well known enthusiasm for what this