

Supply

specifically in the areas immediately within the control of Cabinet Ministers, to give women the role they deserve in Canadian society?

Mrs. Erola: Mr. Speaker, there have been considerable improvements in this area. This is statistical information which I will be happy to provide to the Hon. Member. There is recognition by all members of Cabinet of the status of women in the country and of the commitment to improve that status.

Mr. Nickerson: Mr. Speaker, might I ask the Minister responsible for the status of women if she would undertake, on behalf of the Government, to introduce in the House within the next six months amendments to the Indian Act which would get rid of the blatant discrimination against women that exists in the Act? If not, why not?

Mrs. Erola: Mr. Speaker, I concur completely with the Hon. Member and I believe we will see these changes coming very quickly.

Mr. Miller: Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the Minister responsible for the status of women one question. It seems to me that in quoting a number of Royal Commission reports in the possession of the Government and the Opposition the Minister has made the case that the motion calls for a committee of Parliament to deal with the reports, to see that they are implemented and to judge the activity of the Government in regard to them.

Another thing that a committee of this nature would do is something that the Minister feels is important, and that is undergo a period of education. That could be done for the House and for society as a whole. Would the Minister not admit that a parliamentary committee to deal with all these issues, such as single parent families, daycare, pensions, the International Year of the Child, the problem of increasing divorce, would not only serve the House of Commons but the women we are trying to deghettoize?

Mrs. Erola: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member has missed the point entirely. I do not think we have time to educate the Members of the House, particularly the Members of the Opposition. I suggest to him again that the ghettoization of these women would lead to a further "hiding under the carpet" situation, as exists in society today.

Would the Hon. Member suggest that divorce is a women's issue? That daycare is a women's issue? That pensions are strictly a women's issue? Of course not. These must be studied as broadly and as fully as possible by all Members of the House. When the next report of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women is tabled, I intend that it be studied by a committee of the House or even by a number of committees.

Mr. Hawkes: Mr. Speaker, I think it is appropriate that I should comment at this moment. One of the difficulties with the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs is that it deals with far too many issues—housing, consumer affairs, welfare, daycare and so on. We have been

pushing the Government to provide references to the Committee on a number of issues that the Minister says she is concerned about. Cabinet Ministers have not made such references. It was interesting to note that she complimented the Committee on handling the issue of spousal violence, a reference which came from a Conservative Member. In three years the Committee has not been seized with a single reference from a Cabinet Minister on one of these issues.

We would like more committees; one is not enough. We need references or else we cannot proceed. Would the Minister please indicate why she is blocking the Committee from looking at these issues?

Mrs. Erola: Mr. Speaker, for the reasons I have stated in the House and state again for the third time: the issues are too important to be relegated to a small committee. They must be examined carefully at every level available to Members of the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The period for question and answer has expired.

Mr. Vince Dantzer (Okanagan North): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be able to participate in the debate. Before I get to the substance of my remarks I should like to give recognition to the Hon. Member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald) who opened the debate for this Party. As you well know, Mr. Speaker, she has an honourable and distinguished record for hard work and dedication, not only in the House but throughout Canada, and for helping bring social and economic justice to Canadians. Nowhere is it more apparent than in her untiring attempts to bring social and economic justice to women. She alone is responsible for this debate today, a debate that is absolutely necessary. I should like to give her recognition for bringing it before the public at this time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Dantzer: Mr. Speaker, I hardly ever agree with the Minister responsible for the status of women, but she did touch on an element of truth today when she indicated that, to a large degree, the problems of women exist because society really does not know the problems. The House of Commons knows them—certainly the Opposition does—but I am not sure that the average man and woman on the street is aware of the difficulties of a large number of women in society.

I say that from experience, Mr. Speaker. Three years ago, when I entered federal politics, I thought I was pretty sophisticated and knew most of the problems of society. I thought I had a social conscience and understood social concerns. At one time I spoke at a chamber of commerce meeting and dealt mainly with the budget. After that meeting two young women asked me what my solution would be to the problems of women in the work force. I am ashamed to say that I answered, what problems? That was not a smart answer. I just did not know the problems of the working woman but I quickly learned. Those two young women followed me around in my election campaign and they made me learn.