

*Statute Law Amendment Act*

We will need to see a very sophisticated level of constitutional analysis, argumentation and policy review. We will need to examine laws and other jurisdictions such as international jurisdictions that we have signed. We will also need to give in depth consideration to numerous law reform proposals in light of the equality provisions of the Charter.

The parliamentary Subcommittee on Equality Rights proposed by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Crosbie) is an appropriate vehicle in these very limited cases for determining whether certain federal laws need to be amended to conform with the Charter. In these limited areas, I support the naming of that subcommittee. This subcommittee will have the delicate task of balancing social, economic, political and constitutional considerations as it examines our federal laws.

This Government has gone beyond simply delaying decisions on some of the more difficult questions. It has avoided its responsibility to make the hard decisions of political life by not introducing more comprehensive legislation on equality. It could have ensured that all distinctions be given the broadest and largest interpretation, thus setting the appropriate tone and sending out the kind of message of openness to our visible minorities, to the native people, women, the handicapped and the courts of this land. Instead, it has tossed the bulk of equality issues, equality issues that need no more discussion and which should be legislated immediately, into a discussion paper.

The Charter of Rights educational fund, a volunteer group of women lawyers, certainly gave us something as a model, for they produced a 2,000-page document addressing and recommending in great and minute detail the needed changes. How can the Minister of Justice with all his staff and all their resources not feel both embarrassed and irresponsible when he presents such meagre, almost unimportant technical changes as his response to the April 17 deadline? I think it is a shame.

My colleagues, the Hon. Member for York Centre (Mr. Kaplan) and the Hon. Member for York South-Weston (Mr. Nunziata), expressed their concerns for the present Government's action. Only the least controversial amendments have been introduced, they noted. All the issues that dealt with unpopular groups or were controversial or expensive to implement have not obtained justice from the Department of Justice. My confrères feared that the neglect of the Government to implement the Charter fully might result in the Government's relying on public opinion, which can be very insensitive to women, minorities and to the determination of their rights.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, if the Government allows the general public to make the decisions about these rights instead of acting itself to entrench vested rights in the Charter, the Conservatives could be allowing the majority to determine the rights of the minority. I should not have to remind the Minister of Justice (Mr. Crosbie) of the danger of this. Unfortunately, this must be done, and urgently, because I am very much afraid that this discussion paper will give the Government an excuse to blame the so-called majority for any possible irresponsibility.

[English]

If this Government is afraid to bite the legislative bullet, those in this country who are minorities or disadvantaged groups will have no recourse but to go through a prohibitively expensive court process to see non-complying legislation tested and struck down.

I listened to the comments of a number of Members here with respect to *Obstacles* and the document *Equality Now!* I remind Hon. Members that *Equality Now!* was just recently tabled and was in the process of being addressed by our Government. With respect to *Obstacles*, 116 of the 145 recommendations have been implemented, and follow-up responses and meetings have been taking place. Is this Government going to treat its women and its minorities fairly, without forcing them to undertake expensive, unnecessary and time-consuming court challenges? Actions to date lead me to assume that the Government is going to let these groups incur incredible costs. It is patently clear from the limited actions taken in Bill C-27 to correct inequalities that the Government is unresponsive to the handicapped, visible minorities, and native and women's groups it was elected to serve. Time, effort, thought, new directions and legislative change recommendations went into the report, but they were not heard. The Government has made many promises. The time for action is now.

● (1740)

I would suggest that the voices of the Minister of State for Multiculturalism (Mr. Murta) and the Secretary of State (Mr. McLean) have not been heard in an appropriate manner, and I think that is a shame. Why did they not insist on appropriate legislative change?

[Translation]

Let me give you an example. Bill C-27 does not deal with the issue of sexual orientation. Quebec is the only province to have shown enough courage to guarantee non-discrimination based on sexual orientation. Indeed, what has the Federal Government done until now? Has it acted fairly to provide true equality, especially for women? Has it taken its responsibilities seriously? I do not think so. We can look in particular at their actions on the issues of sexual orientation, the disabled, visible minorities and women. The Government has suggested a discussion on these issues so that it would not have to make a decision which the public might not like.

Mr. Speaker, we have had enough rhetoric. The Charter on equality deserves better than to be evaluated on the basis of its popularity at the polls.

[English]

Surely the Government could have opened its mind a little further and accepted certain legislative provisions that contained distinctions between the treatment of certain sectors of society, distinctions that the needs of society and the welfare of its members will support. I am referring specifically to the handicapped, to older workers and to maternity benefits under the Unemployment Insurance Act.