

*Status of Women*

Finally, amendments have been introduced to the Criminal Code to include equal jury duty for men and women in criminal cases. These amendments propose also to remove the anachronistic vagrancy clause as well as whipping as a penalty, which is sex discrimination in reverse.

Mr. Speaker, I shall close my remarks by reiterating that the government does not intend to stand still. We shall strive to work towards elevating the status of women in Canada to the point where discrimination by reason of sex will be a thing of the past.

**Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West):** Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to have this opportunity to reply to the minister's statement even though the statement is late. The report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women was tabled, I believe, in December, 1970, and for the life of me I cannot understand why it has taken the government until May, 1972, to give us some idea of their views on it.

**Mr. Stanfield:** That is quick for them.

**Mr. Alexander:** I say with the greatest of respect that this statement perhaps indicates that we are not too far from an election because the government has now said that it has some interest in women.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Alexander:** I also wonder, if the minister has had this report in his possession since December, 1971, why the Women's Liberal Association suddenly met with him yesterday and immediately after that meeting we have a statement by the government. I think more people are involved with the status of women than those in the Women's Liberal Association.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Alexander:** Mr. Speaker, I want to go on record as saying that among the women of Canada, and I have said this before, are women of skill. We have not drawn on their skills sufficiently. It has not been recognized that among our women there is a reservoir of skills which certainly can play a meaningful role in the development of our Canadian way of life.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Alexander:** May I say that for our people in 1972 Canada must not only be a land of opportunity but a land of equal opportunity, and that means equal opportunity for all individuals regardless of race, creed, colour or sex.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Alexander:** I do not know why, in a statement of such importance, the minister evaded one of the most important issues facing women today, the issue of abortion. It seems to me that for one reason or other the government is deliberately avoiding facing this issue. The abortion rate is going up continually. Women are in dire financial straits. As I understand it, the government has

[Mr. Mackasey.]

indicated that it will set a date when abortion can be debated in the House. Why was this not mentioned in the minister's statement?

Another area I ought to mention is the LIP program. With all due respect, it seems to me that the LIP program serves the interests of women who have reached the secondary level of education. What happens to those women who have not reached that level of education and really need help but have not been helped by the LIP program since it affects those with a secondary level of education?

I am pleased to note that the government is moving in the area of fair employment practices. That is a step in the right direction. I understand that the Minister of Labour (Mr. Mackasey) intends to bring in amendments to remove bias in employment on grounds of age, sex and marriage. This step must be taken if we are to be consistent and give everyone an equal opportunity.

I am disturbed that the minister although he boasts of the family planning division which has been set up to co-ordinate federal endeavours in the field of planned parenthood, nowhere in his statement mentions co-ordination of plans with those provinces and municipalities in which competent but overworked birth control and family planning clinics already exist. One of the more important omissions is that abortion was not placed before the minister.

I should like to say a word about another area which I think deserves immediate consideration, that involving those women who belong to the group making up Canada's first citizens. They live in deplorable conditions. They seem to be the forgotten part of our culture. I hope the government will pay sufficient attention to the needs of native women and show leadership in the development of certain programs of benefit to them, particularly in the field of health care. That is an area into which we must move because there is great necessity for such programs.

I have not read the booklet the minister tabled. We shall see what is in it. I hope the statement he made was not made for political reasons. I hope the statement was made to show the government's genuine concern about the status of women.

May I pay tribute to the woman who, I think, has had a great deal to do with the thinking of the government in these matters, Miss Sylva M. Gelber, Director of the Women's Bureau, Department of Labour. She seems to have her finger on all these problems. I believe it is an extremely difficult job for her alone to bring significant points to the attention of not only members of the House of Commons but also of the people of Canada.

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I believe that electoral reform must come in order that more women can be candidates for membership in this august House, not because they are women but because they have compassion, understanding, experience, wisdom and expertise that this House can certainly use.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Alexander:** I see that Your Honour is getting a little impatient. There is quite a bit more I could say. We will