

Supply

My question is, how can this government entertain that statutory decision or commissions existing in this country under statute of this House are equal or able to deal with constitutional questions which are the first law of the land and are not, in my view, similar in any way, sense or shape. How can one pretend that there are other avenues than to go to the courts to get your constitutional rights affirmed and clarified? How can one say that?

Is the minister close to him in agreement with the Deputy Minister of Justice?

Mr. Dorin: Mr. Speaker, I think the point is that we have a multitude of programs at the federal level to try and assist people in ensuring that they receive their basic human rights. We are involved in many, many ways in this area.

The fact of the matter is, as was pointed out in the earlier debate by others, that the administration of justice is a provincial responsibility. It is not up to the federal government to simply take the whole burden in this area. We think it is time that some of the others started to take their part of the load.

Mr. Ian Waddell (Port Moody—Coquitlam): Mr. Speaker, I have a short question.

You say it is time for other levels, meaning the provincial level. Right? That is what the minister was talking about.

If francophones in Alberta want to exercise their rights under the Official Languages Act, or other rights of the Constitution, and they go to the government of Premier Getty are they going to get money to finance that case?

Some hon. members: No way.

Mr. Waddell: Who is kidding whom?

Mr. Dorin: Mr. Speaker, I cannot speak for the Government of Alberta and I do not plan to. This hon. member will know, and all hon. members will know, that from time to time I have disagreed with the Government of Alberta even though it happens to be of the same political persuasion. Once in awhile I would like to see members of the NDP disagree with some of their provincial counterparts when they know that they are wrong rather than just standing up and repeating those lines.

An hon. member: Against the gospel.

Mr. Dorin: They should be telling their provincial counterparts to take their responsibilities seriously and not leave it all to the federal government rather than coming into this House and demanding that we do it. They should be speaking to their political cousins back home if they are so supportive of them.

Mr. Jack Iyerak Anawak (Nunatsiag):

[*Editor's Note: Member spoke in Inuktitut*]

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to be here. I am pleased to rise today in support of the motion of my hon. colleague calling upon the government to restore the Court Challenges Program.

A great many ordinary Canadians are deeply concerned by the government's recent decision to terminate this program. The program has benefited women, minorities, disadvantaged groups and aboriginal people. It has enabled these groups to mount court challenges under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It has provided financial assistance for the preparation and defence of test cases.

Without this program many of these court challenges simply would not have happened and Canada's human rights situation would be worse than it is. If the program is not reinstated many cases which would benefit Canadians will not even get to court.

Lawyers are expensive. Fighting government in the courts is expensive. The government has all kinds of resources at its disposal.

Ordinary Canadians with human rights grievances do not have the resources that the government has.

This program, the Court Challenges Program, has helped equalize the imbalance in resources between ordinary Canadians and government.

The Court Challenges Program was first established in 1978. At that time it dealt only with official language minority rights.

In 1982 the program's mandate was expanded to include the new language rights guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In 1985, after the charter section on equality rights came into force, the program was expanded to include equality rights.