

Status of Women Study

Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Basford) or perhaps the Secretary of State (Mr. Pelletier) who has responsibility for culture, to prescribe new kinds of regulations by which we could move away from the kind of willy-nilly consumer approach that has been adopted toward women in our society. How one changes basic attitudes is certainly a question that cannot easily be answered in the course of this debate or by the legislative response in this chamber. There are situations that have been referred to today which indicate there is discrimination which could be resolved by law.

I was extremely disappointed to note that, according to the report on the status of women, my native province of Prince Edward Island was still making a real difference between men and women in the minimum wage laws. We know that in government service and private employment there is far too much sex typing, which in many cases prevents capable women from seeking positions. The situation pertaining to manpower retraining in Prince Edward Island causes me some concern. I think we must be more aware of the difficulties faced by women if these retraining schemes are to be of use to them.

In concluding these brief remarks, in what I hope is the opening debate in an ongoing series of considerations to be given to this question, I should like to come back to what I think is essential to our concern and that is, the role to be played by woman in our society. The problems in this area, while they may be met to a degree by legislative or bureaucratic decisions, are basic problems. I think they can only be dealt with in terms of the essence of the main problem. A moment ago I mentioned the basic problem of attitude, but I think that in terms of the status of woman there is the basic problem of identity. I was struck by a quotation from "The Feminine Mystique" by Betty Friedan, which reads:

The core of the problem for women today is not sexual but a problem of identity—a stunting or evasion of growth that is perpetuated by the feminine mystique. As the Victorian culture did not permit women to accept or gratify their basic sexual needs, our culture does not permit women to accept or gratify their basic needs to grow and fulfil their potentialities as human beings.

I think that is the problem, Mr. Speaker. Even if we were to implement at once all the recommendations contained in this report, I would be willing to argue that a large proportion of the women in our society would still be imprisoned within their own attitudes in so far as development of their potential was concerned. We would still be faced with the problem of finding the answer to a more effective and realistic family unit in modern day society. As the member for Fundy-Royal (Mr. Fairweather) said, we still would not have dealt with the question of finding a more productive and positive outline for a relationship between man and woman in our society. I believe that the new-found freedom and potential for woman in our time is not only important for woman herself but for the man she will marry and with whom society will be shared.

[Mr. MacDonald (Egmont).]

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to have been named as the seconder of the motion presented this afternoon by the hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Brewin), and I am happy to take part in what I am sure those of us who are here will agree is a very important debate. One could wish that such importance were recognized by more of our colleagues in all parts of the House. But all good causes have to be pushed.

● (4:50 p.m.)

May I say respectfully to the Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Andras) responsible for housing, who spoke awhile ago, that despite the short reference of a partisan nature in which he indulged, we appreciate his acceptance of this motion and of this debate as an attempt on the part of the New Democratic Party to get the discussion rolling on this important subject. We welcome his being able to stand in his place and announce a number of things that the government is doing. I do not think they all began with the Prime Minister's (Mr. Trudeau) speech of last Wednesday night. However, it has been our experience in this place that even though the government announces good intentions, it takes an awful lot of prodding to get action on those intentions. I think it is fair to say that hon. members on both sides of the House this afternoon and this evening will be doing that, prodding the government into acting on the proposals contained in the report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women and into acting on the suggestions being made by members on the floor of the House.

Sir, as the hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Brewin), my colleague, has already said, it is our desire, in this part of the House, to concentrate in each of our speeches on certain specific aspects of the over-all problem. Hon. members will not be surprised if I say that the areas I shall talk about will relate to such things as pensions and insurance programs and employment in the public service. I should like to indicate some of the things that we think ought to be dealt with in these two main areas.

The more I study the report of the royal commission, and the more I think about the problem, the more I am impressed with the magnanimity of the task. You can hardly turn a page of most of our statutes without finding some differentiation between men and women. This is particularly true of the areas about which I am especially concerned, pensions and insurance, employment and so on.

Mr. Alkenbrack: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, did the hon. member not mean to say "magnitude" instead of "magnanimity" when he referred to the task?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, if I said that, I welcome the correction. I suppose my hon. friend feels that we are now even, since the other day I pointed out that although he meant George III, he said George IV.

Mr. Fairweather: The kings and queens of England are being shuffled around this afternoon.