

Routine Proceedings

• (1540)

I listened very carefully to the minister responsible for women's issues speaking of what she would like to see women achieve in the next while with regard to a high percentage at the corporate level and a high percentage here in the House of Commons. I think we all would like to see that. However, when I look at what has happened in this recent budget, it gives me great doubt that she is really serious. For instance, this recent budget has axed day care, thus reneging on the government's 1984 electoral promise to create a national day care system.

It has stated that it will not make retroactive payments prior to 1990 for pay equity. It has announced that it will cancel a spousal allowance program should it result in substantial increases in government funding. It has cancelled the Court Challenges Program, denying many women, among others, the chance to make their charter rights become reality. It has cut back spending on social housing and cut the co-operative housing program, two programs upon which many Canadian women are dependent. Royal commissions and new laws are not sufficient when the financial underpinnings are absent. Good publicity, bad social and economic policy is just not good enough.

Ms. Lynn Hunter (Saanich—Gulf Islands): Mr. Speaker, when women gather these days, it is often to talk about hardship. We talk about violence and we talk about fear, violence against our sisters, our friends, our mothers, our daughters and ourselves, and our worries for the next generation. Today, however, for International Women's Day I prefer to honour our achievements of the past, reflect on the connections between women's lives and celebrate our role in the ongoing struggle against discrimination.

Women have had to struggle for every right we have. I stand here now, a member of Parliament, when once I would have been barred from voting. I have been inspired by the first woman member of Parliament, Agnes Macphail, who was a member of the party which later became the New Democratic Party. While journalists quoted the speeches of her colleagues, they criticized the cut of her clothes, focusing solely on her appearance. All eyes were upon her watching, waiting for a mistake that would prove women were not fit for politics.

When I was first elected, I thought things had changed. Yet still, as women members of Parliament, we

face ridicule. Journalists continue to focus on our appearance. We rise to speak in the House of Commons surrounded by a sea of suits.

I want to acknowledge the minister's comments regarding wanting to have 50 per cent of the House of Commons as women and the Liberal spokesperson applauding that. I want to point out that the New Democratic Party has taken the only steps possible for affirmative action that would encourage more women to run. It was a tough decision, but this party has once again been put on the forefront of that cutting edge, trying to include women in the politics of Canada.

The difference between Agnes Macphail and me is that although it often feels lonely being a woman member of Parliament, I am not alone. I look at the bench in front of me and see my leader, the first woman leader of a major federal political party in North America. I watch my leader rise and speak out for women, and I am proud.

Women are often asked a curious question and those of us who are women in the House will remember this. We are asked: "Do you work?" Women have always worked. We have worked in our homes, bearing and raising children, cleaning, cooking. We have worked in the fields as slaves, as labourers and as farmers. We have worked as nurses on the front line, even though in times past we were excluded from becoming doctors because men said we could not stand the sight of blood. We have worked at the side of husbands, as merchants and are now setting up our own businesses and succeeding at a greater rate than our male counterparts, despite reduced access to credit.

We still face our many battles. A recent motion in the House of Commons to provide adequate funding for birth control research and education put forward by my colleague, the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby, was defeated by the Conservative members of Parliament.

The Court Challenges Program was a victim of the recent budget cuts. This action by this federal government acts to silence women and other disadvantaged groups. Thankfully the B.C. government announced only last week ongoing operational funding of over \$1 million a year for women's centres.