

Government Orders

It was interesting when they gave us the history that Nellie McClung, Emily Murphy and all those wonderful women from Alberta in the 1920s were not even recognized as persons. They took it to the Supreme Court and it was turned down. They did not even get to be called persons. Then in 1929 they took it to the privy council. They went to Lord Chancellor Sankey in England, trying to get overturned the ruling that said: "Women are persons in matters of pains and penalties but are not persons in matters of rights and privileges".

Emily Murphy found that a bit hard and somebody challenged her because she was a magistrate; imagine, a magistrate in Alberta. They challenged her that she was not a person. Five people were allowed to appeal that and away these women went. On October 18, 1929 they were granted by Lord Chancellor Sankey to be persons.

I find it pathetic that somebody has just snorted here and thought this was a real laugh. I want to honour these people for what they did back in 1929. Because of that, she was and I am able to sit in the House of Commons. We are treated as persons. Then of course women got the vote after that.

This is the kind of stuff that is important. I would like to know what those women would think about it. Emily Murphy challenged married women's property rights. If a woman had property with her husband back then and her husband died, she would be tough out of luck. She would lose the title to that land.

Things have come a long way since that day. I really appreciate that. We need to celebrate that. I do think this legislation will take us down a very dangerous, divisive road down and we will be sorry we cannot turn around.

Again I tell my colleagues across the House that as hilarious, scornful, mocking or whatever they think this is, they need to be aware that it will not solve the problems. The NDP could not pass it in Ontario. It will get rammed through the House of Commons but there will be waves and repercussions making it very frightening for people across the country.

Employment equity will breed resentment because it will be assumed that designated groups attained employment not by the merit principle but by legislated coercion. It will label designated groups as being inferior and unable to compete on a level playing field. It is patronizing, hierarchical and elitist. It assumes designated groups need a higher order to run interference for them. It is wrong. It is bad. I am really sorry the government will ram through Bill C-64.

Mr. Ian McClelland (Edmonton Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague mentioned Agnes Macphail. I am presently reading the memoirs of Eugene Forsey. For members who do not recall Eugene Forsey, he was a force of the New Democratic Party. He had a strong ethic for fairness in Canadian society when this was an important thing for people to be doing, as it is today.

• (1315)

In the memoirs of Eugene Forsey he recounts a tale of Agnes Macphail. Members will know that Canadians watching this debate on television do not realize that just outside the Chamber of the House of Commons is a bust of Agnes Macphail. Every time we walk into the opposition lobby we can see the bust of Agnes Macphail.

When Agnes Macphail was at the founding convention of the CCF in Regina in the 1920s there was a motion put forward at the convention in the true socialist manner stating that 50 per cent of all people sitting on committees within the CCF would be women. Women would have employment equity within the party. There would be a balance. No matter what committee it was, 50 per cent of the members would be women.

It was reported by Eugene Forsey that the shortest speech ever made by Agnes Macphail was when she spoke to the convention. She said that she had achieved what she had achieved in her own right, not because she was a woman. It did not work for her and it did not work against her. She wanted to be judged as a person who was capable of achieving her own ends in her own right. She felt that was the appropriate way for all people to be treated.

I thought I would share that little anecdote with members.

I do not suggest that the Liberals have evil motives in bringing this forward. I think their hearts are in the right place, but I do not think their minds are necessarily connected.

I would ask my colleague from Beaver River if she would comment on the notion that perhaps we should be putting our energies into the prevention of discrimination and we should be using the facilities of the country to educate rather than to legislate. What we really have to do is talk about how we can have values in our country, values all Canadians can share, which have to do with the prevention of discrimination and the fact that we are all of us equal Canadians, no matter when we arrived here, no matter the colour of our skin, no matter our gender. We should be addressing the values, we should not be writing laws.

Miss Grey: Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the story about Agnes Macphail. She realized that we are not going to get anywhere by somebody saying we are going to give Agnes special treatment or we are going to give babysitting money to someone when they are running as a candidate.