

Social Policy

North Centre (Mr. Knowles) stated it a while ago, the government is responsible for not having done so when, being in the majority, it could easily have respected its 1974 promise and set up, at long last, a guaranteed minimum income for all Canadian citizens.

● (1642)

[English]

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): First of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald), for bringing in this resolution. It is a sad commentary that such a resolution would in fact be necessary in the Parliament of Canada. It is a reflection on us, this institution, and it is certainly a reflection on the government of the day that enjoys a majority in this House. Indeed, it is a reflection on Canadian society itself.

While I congratulate my colleague the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands for bringing in this resolution, which would certainly commend itself to all sides of the House, it is not the first time that she has risen to speak in this House to bring forward a glaring injustice in the social structure of Canadian society. She was the first to raise the question in the House about the inequities in the Canada Pension Plan which discriminates against the homemaker in a way equally as unjust as discrimination in the provision to provide for spouse's allowance.

Without equivocation and on behalf of my party, we accept the amendments put forth by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). I regret that this resolution will not come to a vote today so that we could watch some of the squirming on the other side of the House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McGrath: If this were coming to a vote, I submit that my learned friend opposite from New Brunswick would not be half as vocal as he is in his seat right now.

The minister, who is not in the House at the moment, referred to intellectual dishonesty in her criticism of the very excellent speech by the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands. If there is any intellectual dishonesty—and in my opinion there is considerable intellectual dishonesty—it resides in the government of the day. Ten years ago this government came to power with the promise of a just society, yet parliament must spend one of its very important days on supply to debate a resolution which identifies discrimination against women.

I would like to tell the hon. gentleman opposite, who is smiling all over, that if he were half as knowledgeable about the subject that I am addressing to the House as the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands, or the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, then I might be willing to accept his interjections, albeit from his seat; but since he has no appreciation of the subject and since, like most of his colleagues over there, he has little or no sympathy for the people to whom the

[Mr. Allard.]

resolution addresses itself, I suggest he contain himself and hold his tongue.

I can understand the minister in her criticism, and I can understand why she got excited, because anybody who has followed the career of the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) would understand the position that she is in today. The word "compassion" is not in her dictionary. If it were, we would not be addressing this resolution today. I suppose the reason for that is that the hon. minister has a background of being a career bureaucrat. She is in fact a bureaucrat's bureaucrat. She is one who has been used to dealing with people as mere statistics or as part of some data coming out of a computer. Otherwise she would be able to put herself in the position of those unfortunate women who today are the forgotten minority in Canadian society. She would be able to put herself in the position of those women who have to pay inflated prices for food and do not have enough money to provide for themselves adequately. The statistics make this point abundantly clear to everybody.

● (1652)

The minister commented in a critical way on the references made by the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands to the now notorious information circular sent out to registered charities by the Minister of National Revenue, who now resides in another place where he is untouchable by this House. It is well that the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands should refer to this insidious document. Were it not for the organizations in this country that speak up for the poor, the forgotten and the social outcasts, it would be a sad day indeed. These people should not be hampered in carrying out these very important activities.

We are told today by the minister—and the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands has been told by the minister who resides in the other place, by way of courier—that the whole matter of this circular is to be reconsidered, and the inference is that it will be withdrawn. Constraints are placed upon charitable organizations in this country that have to deal with a heartless government such as that in power at the present time. The relevant paragraph reads as follows:

The holding of public events to attract public support, recruit new members, raise funds, explain purposes and programs, and generally publicize the organization and its charitable activities is an acceptable activity of a registered charity, but if the purpose of the demonstration is to embarrass or apply pressure upon a government it is considered a political activity.

What kind of a directive is that for a government to issue in a democratic society such as ours? I say shame to the government that allowed a minister of the Crown to send such a document out to respectable charitable organizations. It is only right and proper that they should be embarrassed and have to admit a mistake, and promise that this scandalous document will be withdrawn or substantially amended.

I referred to the inability of the minister to place herself in the position of an old age pensioner or single person on pension. Imagine the hardships such people undergo in order to provide the basic requirements of life. The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands referred to statistics issued by the