

Revised Statutes

amended it is better left out of revision. Anyone who wanted to look at it by consulting the *Revised Statutes of Canada* would probably be misled by not having amendments which seem to come out every few months.

There are other public acts considered to have a lesser public interest. The two identified in the committee to be discussed were the Geneva Conventions Act and the War Crimes Act. It was my feeling with the interest in bringing war criminals to justice that Canadians might like to have those two statutes ready at hand. It would be helpful to Canadians to see them in the books. The Geneva Conventions Act, as the Minister indicated, has been put into the *Revised Statutes* and that will be appreciated by Canadians. The War Crimes Act is of considerable interest, but perhaps with the amendments which the Minister of Justice has brought forward to the Criminal Code dealing with war criminals for the first time this may make the War Crimes Act of less interest. It is still a statute of Canada. It may well be referred to in some of the criminal trials, if there are any, which could result from the Criminal Code amendments on war criminals.

I want to indicate our support for this process. It may be that if the loose-leaf versions of the *Revised Statutes of Canada* take hold that further revisions of acts like this may be unnecessary. Computer changes may develop in such a way that hard paper *Revised Statutes* every 10 or 15 years may never again be required. In that sense, we would close a chapter in our history by putting forward what could be the last *Revised Statutes of Canada* that will ever be needed in the formal paper sense. I am very pleased to be here for that occasion, providing something that I know is useful to all Canadians.

• (1130)

Ms. Marion Dewar (Hamilton Mountain): Madam Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise to speak in this debate on behalf of my Party. I am probably the only person who is not a lawyer who will speak on this matter today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Dewar: I must say that I am quite comfortable speaking to the Bill because I think this legislation does concern me as a Member of Parliament, as a woman and as a New Democrat.

First, I would like to deal with the lack of sexist language in the *Revised Statutes of Canada*. There is a need to include gender-neutral language in the statutes of Canada. I think sometimes we take this need lightly, but it is very important.

We are talking about societal changes here. When talking about those societal changes, we know that we are talking about changes in the attitude toward women. It is very important that the language in the statutes remain gender-neutral. I think the Minister has certainly done an excellent job in this regard, and I do appreciate that.

A few years ago we went through a process of changing the definition of rape to sexual assault. This made quite a difference in the attitude of society.

My colleague, the Hon. Member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson), our spokesperson for justice, has been urging the Government to work in the direction of non-sexist language provisions in the statute law of Canada for many years. Recently he was a member of the legislative committee dealing with Bill C-53, an Act to amend the Supreme Court of Canada Act and other Acts in consequence thereof. The Bill was debated in the House at second reading and referred to a legislative committee on September 14, 1987.

It was in committee that my colleague pointed out to the Government that it was continuing to put forward legislation which included sexist language. I would like to quote from that committee report as I believe what was discussed is very relevant here today. In committee, the Hon. Member for Burnaby said:

Why is it that the Department of Justice is still not capable of drafting in non-sexist language? I had hoped, Mr. Chairman, those that were brought before this House could by now be drafted in non-sexist language. We go through this each time bills appear before the committee. We amend them. Surely to God it is not that difficult to prepare legislation in non-sexist language.

The Minister replied by saying:

It is a good reminder. You are the watchdog on sexist language. The Department of Justice has failed and I take responsibility for that. However, you will be there with your amendments to ensure that there is not... The message is received. My deputy is here. We will take it into account.

The Government took the criticism and provided for amendments to the legislation when it was reported back to the House on October 7. My colleague from Vancouver—Kingsway then spoke to those amendments on October 23. He thanked the Minister of Justice (Mr. Hnatyshyn), as I do now, for recognizing the problem and for going about correcting it.

What I find most surprising about this recent example is that today we are dealing with legislation that will correct past anomalies and errors. This legislation will deal with some elements of sexist language but it does not end the job. The recent amendments to Bill C-53 provide a very specific example of how even today there is a need to maintain vigilance in this area. The drafters of legislation must always remember that there are subtle ways in which sexism is promoted.

In passing Bill C-94 today, I would like to remind the Government that the work to remove sexist language from the statute law of Canada and in fact from all areas of the law must not stop until the job is complete. An important first step will be to begin drafting legislation in non-sexist and gender-neutral terms. If the legislation is drafted without such glaring errors, there will be no need to correct and amend legislation in the future. I would encourage the Government to seriously consider ways in which such problems could be avoided in future.