

Status of Women

and paternity benefits should be waived. If we had that kind of amendment in this bill in regard to unemployment insurance, we would be making some kind of progress.

If we are to be serious about ending discrimination, we should also make changes in labour laws wherever required to provide collective bargaining rights and fringe benefits for domestic and part-time workers. We also require exploration of the concept of greater individual choice in the work week and work year. We need to amend our pension laws to give all women, including those who work at home, the same right to join pension plans and to draw benefits as enjoyed by men.

We must establish a comprehensive sex education program in the schools to end some of the stereotyping that goes on in regard to the respective roles of men and women in our society. Further, we need guaranties that male and female students are equally entitled to enrol in any course of their choosing, so that girls can become doctors, bank managers, or whatever they desire, and not be discouraged by guidance counsellors so they end up as being only tellers or nurses. We also need to eliminate sex stereotyping in all school text books. This is an insidious way of perpetuating the roles that men and women must conform to.

In addition, we need action to ban advertising which exploits sex and demeans the role and place of women in society. I believe we need amendments to take abortion out of the Criminal Code so that women are free, in accordance with their own conscience, to act on qualified medical advice. We need to have established in this country more sex education and birth control centres adequately equipped to advise on family planning, on birth control methods, abortion, and pre- and post-natal care. Lastly, we require community programs to encourage and assist women to take their full part in the political and cultural life of our country. Those are positive proposals, Madam Speaker. They are not new; they have been recommended by the royal commission and advocated by women's groups in this country. But this government has just dragged its feet in regard to implementing some of these very worthwhile and positive recommendations.

This omnibus bill, Bill C-16, provides a few improvements for the status of women in this country, but not many. There is still much to be done, but this government seems to be in no hurry to do it. I hope we will not think of this bill simply as a bill concerning women; I think we should regard it as more than that; because women's issues are men's issues too. We are part of a total society and we must understand that the measure of our society is how we treat all components of that society. The quality of our total society is surely measured by the quality of the least advantaged in our society. The measure of Canadian society today shows that there is no even-handed justice when it comes to the poor, the native people and to women.

We in Canada have deprived one-half of the Canadian population—the female population of this country—of their just place in our society. We have in turn been deprived of the potential of one of our greatest resources, the 11 million women who suffer discrimination because of government inaction.

In conclusion, I should like to quote from the Women's Bureau, 1974 report. I think they put this issue of the

[Mr. Symes.]

status of women in our country very eloquently. At page 31 of the report they say:

When law affects women in a way that is different from the way it affects men, to the detriment of one or the other, then the quality of Canadian law is reduced. When the courts interpret the law in such a way as to reveal the influence of outmoded social traditions, traditions such as those which support a double standard of morality, one standard applying to men and another standard applying to women, then the quality of Canadian justice is diminished. When social custom and tradition remain fixed and unreformed in the face of growing awareness of the injustice of a double standard based on sex, then the quality of the Canadian way of life, for men as well as for women, is demeaned.

• (1650)

This situation of discrimination against women in Canada has existed in the past and it exists today. It is time it was stopped. This bill falls far short of tackling the major problems facing women, which I have described. I hope this minister and the Liberal government will finally wake up to the severity of the problem of discrimination in this country and make some fundamental reforms to the law instead of the token gestures which we have seen to date.

Mr. Cullen: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think it should be pointed out that the engagement of the hon. member for Sault St. Marie (Mr. Symes) was recently announced in the newspapers, and I am sure his intended bride will be reading this speech over and over again.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Laprise (Abitibi): Madam Speaker, this afternoon we have undertaken the study of Bill C-16, a long-awaited bill, and I am almost tempted to say that the bill is late in arriving, since most women to whom the bill applies have shown so far their capacity and competence in numerous fields.

Madam Speaker, we have witnessed today a peaceful demonstration that has proven to us that when women put their mind to it, they can achieve great things. Within a few weeks or months at the most, they were successful in obtaining over 1,200,000 signatures with a view to having the government understand that abortion laws should not be liberalized any further. And I was especially glad this afternoon to witness a female member of Parliament accept, on behalf of her colleagues, to submit the petition to the Chair. Indeed I wish to congratulate the hon. member for South York (Mrs. Appolloni) for the way in which she carried out this task, which was greatly appreciated.

Madam Speaker, we are also in a position to note the way you carry out your duties. We cannot help but notice your patience, and especially your tactfulness, when you have to call hon. members to order. There is also a woman presiding over the Senate debates, and there again, we can see the competence with which she carries out her duties.

Besides, another lady had preceded her and I believe we find in parliaments everywhere women who assert themselves.

In Germany, there are 30 women who are members of Parliament in the Bundestag and one of them is the president of that Parliament. In England, a lady is at the