

*Supply*

since this, the Government indicates, can be safely ignored until after 1985.

Not only is the Government failing to review its laws to determine which are discriminatory, but it is also refusing to amend laws which blatantly discriminate against women. For instance, the Indian Act: the Government has made no move to amend Section 12(1)(b) of the Indian Act, even though there has been international condemnation of it. As well, a special subcommittee of the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development in the fall of 1982 called for its immediate repeal. There has not even been one representative of the Native Women's Association of Canada invited to the Constitutional Conference on Native Rights which is to be held here in Ottawa on March 15 and 16, even though one of the major items includes the rights of native women.

• (1115)

With regard to the Unemployment Insurance Act, the Government has failed to amend sections of that Act which discriminate against pregnant women. These discriminatory aspects have been brought to the attention of the Government by the Canadian Human Rights Commission in its unsuccessful attempts last December to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act. They were unsuccessful, Mr. Speaker, because they offended the very groups they were intended to benefit. The Government touched on the issue of discrimination on the basis of pregnancy, but only within the very narrow confines of the Human Rights Act. The fact that the Canadian Human Rights Act cannot override the discriminatory aspects of the Unemployment Insurance Act was left untouched.

These and other Acts have not even been considered by the Government in this three-year period. I could mention the Income Tax Act, the Elections Act and a great many other Acts which today discriminate against women. If the three-year period between 1982 and 1985 goes by without substantial action on the part of the federal Government to introduce and pass the legislation necessary to confirm equal rights for women, then the result is that our courts are going to be swamped. It may take decades to rule through the courts on every challenge. Now, the Government of the day may be able to afford the time, so it thinks; I am saying to the Government that the women of Canada cannot afford that time.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Miss MacDonald:** But if women cannot afford legal inequality any longer, how much less can they afford economic inequality?

[*Translation*]

Equality and legal guarantees are very important to women but this does not feed and clothe the children. It does not give them dignity and comfort in their old age. That is why women must also attain economic equality.

[*English*]

Women have the right, sir, to the same opportunity of freedom from poverty and need, to dignity and self-respect, as

any other Canadian. They have the right to those opportunities for themselves and their children. Largely, however, these rights continue to be denied.

Let me bring that clearly to your attention, sir, by these statistics which I will present. The facts make this so clear. Women in the labour force today in Canada earn less than half the income their male counterparts earn. Households headed by women earn only two-fifths of the income of households headed by men. Two-thirds of Canada's elderly who live below the official poverty line are women. That is 350,000 elderly women, sir, who live below the poverty line. Now, these are the economic realities that women in Canada face today, and they will continue to face those economic realities tomorrow so long as nothing is done to change the situation.

We have had a great deal of talk from this Government about its awareness and concern for the economic plight of women. We have heard of the soul searching and hand wringing over pensions, high technology, training programs and affirmative action. Government Departments have initiated reports, white papers and green papers without number. But when it comes to doing something, they do nothing. All the studies and papers are turning grey with age, and meanwhile women continue to receive the short end of the stick.

• (1120)

The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women published a report two weeks ago entitled "A Working Majority—What Women must do for Pay" that makes the situation very clear. The authors of the report, Pat and Hugh Armstrong, stated that they were depressed with what they found. I recommend to Hon. Members the statement on page 216 of the report, which reads as follows:

Depressed by an economy that continues to structure women into women's work at women's wages in spite of laws forbidding differential treatment of men and women:

Depressed by the nature and condition of their paid and unpaid work which structure out alternatives even though women have been flooding into the labour force and even though domestic work and technology have dramatically changed:

Depressed by women's high underemployment and unemployment rates which will continue to grow with the microelectronic revolution, in spite of women's increasing educational attainment and the recent raise in demand for women workers.

The authors said that they were depressed. They have a right to be depressed, sir. In that last statement I read lies potentially the greatest lost opportunity for women today. The explosive growth of the microelectronic industry is today a world reality.

The microchip revolution is upon us, yet what could be a fundamental opportunity for women in the labour force to obtain equality—this is the one chance for women to make that breakthrough—looks as if it will bring about disaster for women. Many jobs will be lost. Everyone that I have talked to in the industry has indicated that, in the short term, jobs will be lost, most of them in areas of employment traditionally performed by women. Many hundreds of thousands of jobs,