

Statements by Ministers

rights within our own homeland. We do not, as some countries do, merely talk. Our laws bring substance to the kind of society we wish to have, a society which respects people of all races, colours, religions, sex, and background. That is to our glory. We can be very proud and I want to join with all Members of this House in proclaiming this happy occasion.

We in the Liberal Party have some very special reasons to be proud of the role we have played over the years in this respect. Certainly everyone in my caucus is concerned about human rights. We can look back at some of the major events, not to mention the many minor events, which have occurred in the past in an effort to uphold human rights and equality. For example, the bringing into effect of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, the Court Challenges Program for official languages, and The Charter of Rights and Freedoms itself. Then, of course, there are the guidelines which have been in existence in Treasury Board and so on to try and make sure that people have equality in the Public Service. However, we have a ways to go.

Those in my caucus who are policy critics in various areas should really be given some opportunity to speak, but they cannot since only one person can respond. Our Party Whip expresses his concerns as official languages critic, the Hon. Member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine East (Mr. Allmand), is our employment critic, our labour and housing critic is also on our committee for social policy, our critic for communications, as well as working on the status of women and youth, has given great leadership in this area, and I would also like to bring forward the name of the critic for the status of women, the Hon. Member for Outremont (Mrs. Pépin); all of those people deserve an opportunity to express their views so I am trying on their behalf to simply express the fact that they and the rest of our caucus are particularly interested in the struggle being carried on in our country to bring equality to all our people.

However, it is not enough to merely have guidelines and to speak in generalities. We must also have teeth in our law. We must have legislation and charters which will allow people to come before the courts with their concerns and grievances with some effect and justice.

Therefore, on behalf of this party I would like to say that we are not satisfied, despite the past, that we have done enough, particularly at this time when we are considering Bill C-62, to see that the handicapped, the native peoples and women of our country, the visible minorities, have legislation with teeth. On this occasion I call upon the Government to try to change its Bill so that it will recognize the urgent need to bring justice and freedom to our people.

[Translation]

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity today to speak on behalf of the New Democratic Party and join the other Members of this House in celebrating the anniversary of the proclamation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and especially the

first anniversary of the proclamation of Section 15 of the Charter.

[English]

Certainly all of us in this House are very proud of the proclamation of the Charter of Rights. I know the history of my colleagues in the NDP, and our predecessors in the CCF, who fought long, hard and valiantly to ensure entrenched protection of human rights in Canada's Constitution. One year ago today we proclaimed the final section of the Charter of Rights, Section 15. At the same time all of us expressed the hope that it would not be necessary to rely upon court challenges to enforce and protect fundamental rights such as the right to equality, the right to protection against discrimination on the grounds set out in Section 15, indeed on grounds which were not set out specifically but which were implicitly included, such as political belief and sexual orientation. One year later we must examine with care the record of the Government. I believe that in examining that record against the benchmark of equality, Section 15, we must say that much work remains to be done in order to ensure that equality is a reality for all Canadians.

We celebrate today the accomplishments of those Canadians who fought so hard for a strong, entrenched Charter of Rights. The *ad hoc* women's committee who, in a tremendous display of energy and dedication from right across this land, came together and insisted on the inclusion of Section 28 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The disabled, groups such as COPOH and others, who appeared day after day before the Constitution Committee and to this day have insisted upon real action towards equality.

I would note in that regard the concern expressed by groups representing the handicapped, in particular the Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped, with respect to the Government's response on human rights and fundamental freedoms. They suggest that if they were to give a grade to the Government's response, it would be a D minus. They criticize the paternalistic approach taken by the Government. I note in that regard that because of the absence of effective legislative response to equality provisions of the Charter, it will indeed be necessary to make major challenges in the courts of this land. In that regard I note with regret that the Government has still not accepted the recommendations of the Canadian Council on Social Development which over a month ago submitted recommendations for a panel for the Court Challenges Program. I take this opportunity to call upon the Secretary of State to approve that panel and let the CCSD get on with the business of funding these important court challenges.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, there are other questions as well in this area, and I might mention, for instance, the pressing need for an amendment to our equality rights legislation.