

Adjournment Debate

There are other significant contributions that could be made to enhance the Gatineau and other areas of the community, but we do not have to destroy the traditional name which has probably accompanied the airport for some time. I am not only referring to this part of our great country. We must remember that we have a tradition of names and history. Regardless of whether it is Newfoundland, the Maritimes, Quebec, Ontario or whatever it may be, we should think—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Guilbault): I regret to interrupt the Hon. Member, but the time allowed for the consideration of Private Members' Business has come to an end.

• (1800)

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[English]

A motion to adjourn the House under S.O. 45 deemed to have been moved.

STATUS OF WOMEN—NATIVE WOMEN'S RIGHTS. (B) WOMEN'S ATTENDANCE AT EDMONTON CONFERENCE

Ms. Lynn McDonald (Broadview-Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I am very glad to have the opportunity to follow up on a question asked of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) about the timing of legislation to end inequality for native women, or repeal of Section 12(1)(b) of the Indian Act and the reinstatement of native women and their children who lost their status.

I am very concerned about the complacency with which the Prime Minister regarded the question. He said that if by chance we could not pass the legislation, the Charter of Rights would still hold. I wonder about the chance to which he is referring. Does he know something we do not know? Will the Conservatives hold back the legislation? It is very clear that members of the NDP want this legislation passed. We would give it priority and we would agree that it be passed quickly.

When we look at the timing, we can see that many years have been spent discussing this matter. The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada recommended in 1970 that Section 12(1)(b) of the Indian Act be repealed. There was agitation throughout the 1960s on this matter, and the discrimination itself goes back to the latter part of the last century.

After the Royal Commission report some cases went to court. Unfortunately, the Supreme Court of Canada, with its lack of wisdom, lack of justice and lack of charity, decided in 1972 that there was no inequality for women and that the Bill of Rights did not hold in the case of Laval and Bedard. Thus, since 1972 it has been imperative to have legislation to change this inequality for women, as the courts would not change it.

In 1975 consultation with Indian groups began in earnest. Some progress was made in the latter part of the decade.

Conservative members who were in government in 1979 said that they would leave the question with the Bands for six months so that the Bands might come up with a proposal, and that if the Bands did not come up with a proposal they would legislate unilaterally. Unfortunately for native women at least, the Conservative Government fell before that legislation was introduced. It is this kind of timing that worries people now. We are coming to the end of a Session and there could be an election before we reconvene after the summer. People are worried that we are again getting close but the legislation will not be brought in and passed.

In 1980, with a Liberal Government back in power, the Sandra Lovelace case was taken to the United Nations for violation of our international commitments to equality. Canada was condemned for this violation. In response, the Government indicated that it would bring in legislation. Many statements have been made to the effect that negotiated consensus would be desirable, but that if there was no such consensus there would be unilateral action. Still we wait year after year. Years have passed while these consultations have continued, and for some people the time will never be right. I do not think that is an excuse for our lack of action.

This discrimination came from a society in which all Canadian women were treated as non-citizens. Women did not have the right to vote and all Canadian women lost their citizenship on marriage to non-Canadians. That is the same kind of situation that now holds true for native women. However, with the strength of the women's movement and with women having the vote in Canada that situation was eventually challenged and Canadian women received the right to hold citizenship. Native women still do not have the same rights of citizenship and we are still fighting for that.

Native women tell us that being treated as second-class citizens makes it difficult for them. They become second-class citizens in terms of housing, welfare and jobs. Because native cultures respect the law, having a lower status in law means having a lower status in practicality.

[Translation]

Equality for women is a matter of justice. We should not seek to negotiate a consensus on this issue. It is not surprising, after a century of abuse and discrimination against women, that Band leaders generally do not recognize native women as their equals. As Parliamentarians, we are the cause of this problem, because we have passed legislation depriving native women of their status. As Parliamentarians, therefore, we must correct this injustice by repealing the discriminating provisions in the Indian Act and by taking strong positive action.

We should not wait for a consensus. We should not try to excuse our inaction by raising the issue of the Bands' democracy, for as long as native women are not reinstated in their status, there could be no democracy.

It is imperative that native women should be immediately reinstated to their full Indian status, that they may work