

*Routine Proceedings*

On this International Women's Day I want to send a message of hope to all Canadians, women and men. I say to them that by working together we can reach our full potential, every one of us; by working together we can shape our joint future.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, on March 8, women from Quebec, Canada and the world over will celebrate International Women's Day. Some of us will spend the day with our loved ones, our families, our colleagues from work or with the women's groups and organizations that we are involved in.

Others will watch from the sidelines, wondering when governments are going to stand up and take action to improve the living conditions of women.

The federal government would have us believe that it is attentive to women's needs. However, its daily actions speak louder than its words, speeches and policy statements. Let us call to mind just some of the Liberal government's acts.

The Liberals' first budget, February 1994, announced unprecedented cuts to the unemployment insurance system. With one stroke of the pen, they took more than \$5.5 billion out of the pockets of the unemployed over three years.

The Liberals decided to take their unemployment insurance cuts in a totally new direction and to hit workers with unstable jobs, who cannot do without unemployment insurance. This hurt women most of all. Women have the dubious honour of holding the majority of unstable jobs.

They reduced the benefit rate and access to them. They dramatically shortened the length of time that benefits can be claimed. They took drastic measures, asking the unemployment insurance fund to foot a disproportionate chunk of the deficit fighting measures.

In his proposed social program reform, the Minister of Human Resources Development went as far as suggesting that eligibility for benefits be subject to a family income test. Since we know that women earn about 72 per cent of what men earn, we know very well who will be penalized by such a measure.

We know that women earn less than their partners and that they often hold unstable jobs. Often, they are the ones who lose their jobs and go on UI. They are maintained in this dependent condition. What a move towards equality.

Women immediately saw what the minister was driving at: women whose spouse's income is above a certain limit are disqualified in spite of the fact that they have been contributing to the UI fund. Attacking financial independence dearly won over the years, the government now wants to turn women into second-class citizens having to depend on their spouses for their every need.

That is why so many women came forward when the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development held its hearings on the social reform package.

They unanimously denounced the minister's proposal, forcing the committee to recommend that he not pursue this issue. We will see in the fall if the minister will choose to ignore the committee's recommendation and implement his proposal anyway. In that case, he can expect fierce opposition on the part of women and the Bloc Québécois.

Monday's budget also speaks volumes about what this government has in store for women.

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The Liberals strike again. Monday's budget contains further cuts, cuts totalling at least \$700 million in UI funding and \$7 billion in transfer payments to the provinces for welfare, health and education. In reality, what will be hacked is cash transfers to the provinces, with a 40 per cent cut in direct federal contributions to health, education and welfare.

What will these blind cuts translate into in actual fact? Either cuts in health and education services or cuts in welfare, which will mean yet more women losing their jobs. Pension reform was also announced. Again, the government is contemplating tying old age pension benefit entitlement to family income. This government is certainly bent on subjugating women to their spouses. Poverty is obviously a sin for which this government wants to make women pay dearly.

The number of public service positions was cut back. Again, women at the lower echelons will be penalized. Also, what is the use of reviewing the Employment Equity Act if it will not be enforced? Coloured, disabled and native women are highly likely to lose their jobs, as they are at a disadvantage to begin with and at the lower echelons. The 160,000 Canadian women on UI and 230,000 Canadian women on welfare were not smiling on Monday night, they were afraid. The 100,000 single parents who rely on social assistance shivered when they realized that they might be deprived of what little they have left.

What about the election promise made by the Liberal Party regarding the creation of 150,000 new day-care spaces? The 1994 budget provided that \$120 million would be invested as early as this year. Today, all we know about that promise is that the Minister of Human Resources Development is discussing with the provinces. If these discussions are anything like the ones the minister is having regarding the social program reform, the Holy Spirit will have to step in to ensure that this promise is fulfilled.

Another measure directly affecting women is the increase in the fees for adult immigrants who apply for permanent residence in Canada. This is more or less tantamount to an immigration tax of \$975 for immigrants, a number of whom are women, in