

who chairs the Special Subcommittee on Equality Rights, described the Government's effort as a housekeeping Bill. I think that is an accurate description of the Bill.

The fact is that so far the Government has refused to accept its responsibility to establish financial aid for individuals who do seek to challenge legislation that may be in breach of the Charter. This is in direct violation of a promise that was made by the present Prime Minister of Canada (Mr. Mulroney) before he became Prime Minister. On August 14, 1984 he was asked by the coalition of provincial organizations for the Handicapped whether he supported the provision of resources by the federal Government to disabled Canadians for the establishment of a rights and freedoms defence fund. The Prime Minister said that a Progressive Conservative Government would financially assist all Charter of Rights cases deemed to be of national importance. He said that cases involving rights of the handicapped and disabled would certainly fall into this category. Mr. Speaker, one would have thought that the promise was fairly clear and one would have hoped that the Prime Minister of the country, being a man of his word, would have fulfilled that promise to the disabled, other minorities, and women. Yet the Minister of Justice (Mr. Crosbie), in reply to a question which I put to him in the Justice Committee, indicated that he personally did not mind making a contribution to funds established by private groups such as the women's groups that are establishing a fund now. He said, "I personally feel that is the best way to go about this. Then they have independence and no one is interfering". He went on to say, "You are suggesting the Government should do all this, the Government should finance it all, but I say that is very much open to argument".

• (1710)

During the election campaign in August the Prime Minister promised that he would establish a fund to assist litigants who want to challenge legislation. In the next breath, when he is in government, his Minister of Justice refuses to establish that essential fund. To suggest that groups and individuals have rights but to deny them the tools with which to fight for those rights, is a hollow remedy.

You are signalling that my time is coming to an end on this speech and I will draw my remarks to a close. Once again, I want to register my profound concern and anger at the fact that the Government has refused to take seriously the challenge which Parliament set forth in passing the Charter of Rights. That Charter does not belong to governments, it belongs to people. The effect of the Government's inaction is to force women and minorities into the courts but to refuse to assure them that they have the financial resources to defend their rights.

Women, the disabled and other minorities are gravely disappointed with the approach that the Government has taken, and I hope that they will make their views known loudly and clearly to the special committee that has been established to consider Section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Statute Law Amendment Act

In closing, I am reminded of the somewhat mocking words of the great British poet, A. E. Housman, who said, "Be still my soul, it is but for a season. Let us endure an hour and see injustice done". There has been too much injustice and too many hours have passed. The time to promote full equality is now. I appeal to the Government to recognize that and to move forward quickly to comply both with the spirit and the letter of Section 15 of the Charter of Rights.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Valcourt (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of State for Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, as the Member for Madawaska-Victoria, I welcome this opportunity to rise in support of the motion by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Crosbie) for second reading of Bill C-27, legislation aimed at amending certain federal Acts to bring them into line with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. However, Mr. Speaker, although I have already had an opportunity, as Parliamentary Secretary, to take part in the adjournment debate, this is the first time in this House, that I have a chance to speak to my constituents, and I want to take advantage of this opportunity to thank the people of Madawaska-Victoria for having given me the privilege of representing them here in Parliament, and also to describe briefly for my hon. colleagues the riding of Madawaska-Victoria.

My riding is located in the northwestern part of New Brunswick. To the west it borders on the Province of Quebec and to the south on the State of Maine, in the United States. My riding extends along the St. John River from the Quebec border to Perth, Andover, and has a population of about 57,000. Seventy-five per cent are Francophones and of French ethnic origin, while 25 per cent have English as their mother tongue. The federal riding of Madawaska-Victoria covers six provincial ridings, five of which are represented by provincial Members in the Government of the Hon. Richard Hatfield.

Mr. Speaker, following the example of some of my colleagues, I would like to explain to the Members of this House that Madawaska-Victoria is a very special riding, because the people belong to what we refer to as the legendary republic of Madawaska, and also because of those hardworking people in the Victoria, Tobique area.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents are mainly engaged in the agro-food business and forestry. I wish I could be as eloquent as some of my colleagues have been with respect to their own ridings, in describing Madawaska-Victoria as a region with warmhearted people, beautiful rivers and marvelous landscapes. However, the people of Madawaska-Victoria also have some major problems. The statistics are nothing to be particularly proud about, but I feel they reflect the legacy we received from the previous Government.

My riding's per capita income is lower than the provincial average, and need I add, Mr. Speaker, that the average per capita income in New Brunswick is much lower than the Canadian average. The unemployment rate in my riding is