

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, March 7, 1983

The House met at 11 a.m.

● (1105)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY, S.O. 62—EQUALITY FOR WOMEN

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands) moved:

This House condemns the Government for the apathy that it has shown toward issues affecting Canadian women and for its failure to promote equality for women, and its inaction with respect to pension reform for women, and its tacit approval of sexual stereotyping and abusive material in the media, as demonstrated by the Government's unwillingness to prevent pornographic films from being shown on pay television, and its lack of commitment to its own affirmative action programme within the public service, and calls upon the Government to immediately establish a standing committee of Parliament empowered to deal with issues that have a particular impact upon women and to review the progress, or lack thereof, made by the Government with respect to such issues.

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is a profound privilege to rise in the House today, on the eve of International Women's Day, at the beginning of this week dedicated to women internationally, and to move this motion on behalf of my Party.

The events in history from 1857 and in 1908 which are commemorated in tomorrow's celebration may long be in the past, but the indifference which gave rise to the sweatshops, to the cotton mills and to the injustices of that day unfortunately still too frequently live on. It is for that reason that the rights of women, which are given prominence on March 8 each year and indeed throughout this week, should be given equal prominence on every day of the year.

[Translation]

Indifference to the concerns and lack of respect for the rights of half the Canadian population is continuing. That is why, we, Members of the Progressive Conservative Party, have put this motion before the House.

[English]

For make no mistake, there is still a deep-rooted apathy in Canada toward women's issues and the condition of women, whether in the labour force or in the home. That apathy, as our motion indicates, is particularly prevalent in the ranks of the federal Government, the one body which could by its leadership, its action and by its participation do so much to improve the status of women if the political will and the political determination were there to do so. Unfortunately, it has not.

● (1110)

We all know what the response to that criticism will be. The Hon. Ministers opposite will rise up and one after the other congratulate themselves on what they have done over the past year. They will cite the new Charter of Rights and the Constitution. There in black and white, we will be told, is proof positive of what the Government's commitment is to the rights of women. We will be told once again how certain Ministers fought for those rights to be entrenched in the Constitution. Oh, how we will be told! Forget, they will say, the original constitutional proposals which excluded women's rights altogether. Forget that the former Minister responsible for the status of women tried so crudely to manipulate the Advisory Council on the Status of Women. Forget the spontaneous fury and the anger of women the length and breadth of this country against that manipulation; and, indeed, forget the tremendously successful efforts of these women, not once but twice, to move the Government from its original constitutional position. Forget, they will try to intimate, that the amendments which led to the insertion of equal rights for women in the Constitution were moved first by the New Democratic Party, and then the re-insertion, when they were cancelled, of the amendment moved by the Progressive Conservative Party. That is how those rights were put into the Constitution, by the Opposition Parties of the day.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Miss MacDonald: We should not be surprised at such forgetfulness on the part of the Government, the forgetfulness of a whole clutch of Ministers, from the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) right on down which has been shown over these past two weeks. That kind of forgetfulness is a hallmark of the present Liberal Government. But let us not forget, sir, that the Constitution requires legislation to eradicate the legal inequalities which exist under present law. Let us not forget that the Government has three years beginning last year to introduce such legislation, after which interpretation will have to be left up to the courts. And let us not forget that to date not one single piece of such legislation has come before the House.

The Government even recently admitted through a Justice official—and I have the quote here from the Ottawa *Citizen* of November 8—that its review of all legislation to bring that legislation into conformity with the Charter of Rights does not include a review of laws which discriminate against women