

Statute Law Amendment Act

I am sure my colleague, the Hon. Member for York Centre (Mr. Kaplan) is aware of this, that the Government is entirely mistaken, Mr. Speaker, and especially the Minister of Justice (Mr. Crosbie), when he informed Hon. Members yesterday that the previous Government, the Liberal Government, had done no work at all on this question. Mr. Speaker, as the House is aware, Cabinet documents are not available to the new Minister, so he is in no position to accuse Members of the previous Government of having failed to work on this question. He does not know. In any case, the Minister does not know what the previous Government did, but we can see for ourselves that the Minister has done nothing at all.

[English]

Mr. Nunziata: Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, when the Hon. Member for Glengarry-Prescott-Russell (Mr. Boudria) was a Member of the Ontario Legislature, he fought very hard day in and day out for equality rights for women, visible minorities, the aged and the disadvantaged in our society. I am sure the Hon. Member is aware that, as part of the constitutional compromise made in 1982 resulting in the entrenchment of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the Constitution Act, it was agreed that Section 15 of the Charter would be delayed for three years in order to give the provincial Governments and the federal Government an opportunity to conduct extensive audits of their respective legislation. It was delayed in order to give the provincial Governments and the federal Government an opportunity to bring those laws into conformity and compliance with Section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

● (1200)

The Hon. Member for Glengarry-Prescott-Russell was a member of the Ontario Legislature. As I have indicated, he fought very hard for minority rights. He is aware that the Government of Ontario has done precious little to bring its laws into conformity with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and specifically Section 15. All the Government of Ontario did was produce a 400-page document to articulate the controversial issues. The Government of Ontario has failed miserably in implementing changes in provincial laws which would ensure compliance and full equality in provincial legislation.

My question to the Hon. Member for Glengarry-Prescott-Russell is: Does he believe that the Government of Ontario has proceeded quickly enough to implement the necessary changes in Ontario laws to ensure full compliance with Section 15 of the Charter?

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, indeed, that is an excellent question. I am sure we all agree that the provinces played a major role in this. But I think the provinces should have seized the opportunity to reassert their commitment toward minorities, women and all people who are disadvantaged, financially or otherwise, and those who are discriminated against. I know that equality has been a low priority for the Government of Ontario. Of course, it published and distributed a very exten-

sive document, in a manner which was not dissimilar to what the federal Government is doing now. The matter is a hot potato. It raises certain controversies. So information was distributed to inform the people of the important issues and the Government waited to see what would happen. It requires a bit more than that if we are going to look into the fundamental rights and freedoms of people.

We measure how civilized a society is by how well it treats its minorities and disadvantaged people, not by how strong the people are. In all societies there are strong people, whether it is or it is not a civilized society. What makes the so-called civilized societies different is the factor of how well the minorities are treated. We must be willing to give the minorities the priority which they deserve and we must be willing to make difficult decisions. They may be decisions on affirmative action.

We have witnessed the reluctance of the provincial Government of Ontario to deal with that issue. Affirmative action programs in Ontario have been delayed and delayed, and nothing has been done by the provincial Government. It has only provided years and years of indecision. I think the best way to summarize the policies of the Government of Ontario is that the best decision is indecision.

[Translation]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One last question. The Hon. Member for Ottawa-Vanier.

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell (Mr. Boudria) on his last answer. Concerning Bill C-27, an Act to amend certain Acts having regard to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the table of contents does not include the Official Languages Act, and I am wondering whether the Hon. Member might give us his impression or view as to why the Government did not deem it appropriate to list the Official Languages Act as being vital to the minority groups he mentioned? As everyone knows, the language issue is important in Canada, and a controversial subject in many regions. I should like to ask him if, in his opinion, there is a major reason why the Government avoided or forgot about including the Official Languages Act in Bill C-27.

Mr. Boudria: First, Mr. Speaker, may I commend the Hon. Member for Ottawa-Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) for all the work he has done with respect to the official languages. I see some Members on the other side who have a somewhat different reaction about this. Even Conservative Members will acknowledge the hard work done in the field of official languages by the former chairman of the Committee on Official Languages Policy and Programs. If Conservative back-benchers are not satisfied, they can join the debate.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say briefly that the primacy of the official languages must be upheld, of course. The Hon. Member for Ottawa-Vanier made that point on many occa-