

Supply

past, has recognized this, as I have in my speech. It is not only the kind of discrimination which we find in the workplace that is important; it is all related to economic issues. Certainly the need for this Parliament to deal with the majority of Canadians—and women make up the majority—and the innumerable kinds of discrimination that influence women's rights, require that this Parliament set up a special committee.

Since we have an Opposition day today, we urge the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and the Minister to set up this committee and let Parliament deal with the myriad of issues concerning women, issues that women are demanding receive more attention.

Mr. Desmarais: Mr. Speaker, is the Hon. Member not aware that Bill C-124 is a temporary restraint Bill that increases women's and men's salaries in the Public Service by 6 per cent this year and 5 per cent next year? I fail to understand the Hon. Member's inference that this Bill favours one sex over another. This is clearly not so. Is the Hon. Member aware of this?

Mr. Miller: I am quite aware of what Bill C-124 does to the Public Service. I am also aware that six and five applies across the board in the Public Service.

Mr. Blenkarn: No, it doesn't.

Mr. Miller: There is no discrimination. I have been corrected by the Hon. Member for Mississauga South (Mr. Blenkarn). If women earn a lower wage, as they do in the Public Service, 6 per cent applied to that low wage will result in much less of an increase than 6 per cent applied to a high wage. That is where we find the discrimination against women in Bill C-124. Women will get less of an increase than men, who in general are higher paid.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The period for questions and answers has now expired.

Hon. Judy Erola (Minister of State (Mines)): Mr. Speaker, I, too, am pleased to address the House today, on the eve of International Women's Day, on the subject of this Government's efforts on behalf of the women in Canada. My gratitude should be extended to the Hon. Member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald) for making this possible.

This is the first Opposition day on this subject since I was appointed Minister responsible for the status of women close to two years ago. I would like to add that I am somewhat surprised that it has taken this long to have the Opposition call for this subject to be debated.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Erola: I am somewhat surprised as well to find that the Hon. Member for Kingston and the Islands has found herself to be a born-again feminist, a convert. The Random House Collegiate Dictionary describes a convert as "one who has acquired different beliefs, attitudes, especially those believed to be better or to adapt a different means or usage".

I suggest to the Hon. Member for Kingston and the Islands that her born-again feminism is very useful to her at the

present moment, but it comes a bit late. I suggest that in her comments not only has she been blissfully ignorant of what this Government has been doing for some time, but perhaps blissfully indifferent as well.

This Government is proud of its record, which dates back to the report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, and of the 100 of the 122 recommendations which have already been implemented. This Government continues with participation in, and contribution to, International Women's Year 1975, the Mexico and Copenhagen Conferences, the National Plan of Action tabled in this House in 1979 and subsequent ratification of the international conventions.

I might add in this regard the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. I wonder if the Members of this House are aware of how few Western countries have signed this convention. By way of evidence of Canada's participation, I offer the Hon. Member the report of Canada's response to the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. We are working very actively and Canada's international record, as the Hon. Member is very much aware, is very good.

Apathy indeed! The record of this past year has been an outstanding one, for it is replete with legislation which has immeasurably improved the status of women in Canada. I submit, however, that we must recognize that we deal not simply with issues concerning rights and claims for equality. Unlike other areas of governance, the struggle is in many cases against intangibles, attitudes, assumptions, prejudices, preconceived notions; in fact, against the host of traditional and societal responses rooted in historic and sociological causes.

Nonetheless, we have grappled with these factors and, as Minister responsible for the status of women, I can proudly say that an awareness, sensitivity and consciousness have become increasingly apparent. My colleagues in Cabinet as well as the Members of my caucus are in touch and are *au courant* with the pressures and demands generated by the expectations of Canadian women. I would hope that I could say likewise for the Hon. Members facing me on the opposite side of the House.

Let me return to the issues. What has this Government done recently? Let me begin with legal and constitutional guarantees. Section 28 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was proclaimed into law by this Government despite much opposition. The women of Canada undertook a historic lobby. Together with a responsive and sympathetic Government, the lobby was extremely effective. We now have the clear and unequivocal principle of equality forever enshrined as a constitutional guarantee.

This event occurred at the beginning of my appointment as the Minister responsible for the status of women, and a challenging and demanding beginning it was. Indeed, it was a momentous event in the history of Canada. It was an exercise in democracy of great significance. Its reverberations will resound for generations to come.