

Status of Women Study

which pertain to provincial jurisdiction, or which are under joint jurisdiction of the Parliament of Canada and of the provincial legislatures, is essential. Quebec has particular rights that it wants to keep in their integrity, and unilateral decision making in this field would be most unwelcome.

Mr. Speaker, in short, the importance of the question raised in this debate is self-evident. I hope that all Canadian women will realize that the time has come for them to assume their responsibilities and to stop letting the men alone work out their liberation. We of the Ralliement créditiste are ready to let women invade our ranks. In saying this, I am in no way referring to Gilberte Côté-Mercier and her group, nor even to the wife of a certain Pierre Mercier of Vancouver.

• (4:10 p.m.)

[English]

Hon. Robert K. Andras (Minister without Portfolio): Mr. Speaker, I believe the New Democratic Party does us and Canada today a service in bringing out for public debate the matter of the status of women in this country. The government welcomes the debate. We hope it swells and continues across the land. I say that for the sake of Canadian women and for the sake of the general goals in respect of social equity in Canada, and not specifically for the sake of the New Democratic Party. I might add that the party that thinks of itself as both the conscience and the foretaster of Canadian politics does well to act as our polestar today, pioneering for women with all the vision of Lester B. Pearson and the present Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau).

Perhaps my hon. friends opposite will forgive me if I should appear to be a little partisan, which is not my natural style. However, I must say that my moral indignation at the mediaeval laxity of this government regarding women is a little hard to raise when the N.D.P. attacks us just six days after the Prime Minister, in a major statement of policy, made this promise:

I pledge the full support of the Liberal government to the removal of discrimination and the provision of opportunity to women in all fields of Canadian life.

That may be a case of unfortunate timing for the NDP, but it is a solemn promise by a government that does not make many promises. It is a promise of quick government action on all the recommendations, that are considered feasible and within federal purview, of the Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. As hon. members know that report was tabled in December and, as I shall detail later, we have already begun to implement as far-reaching process for action. The royal commission in 1967 was asked to recommend what steps might be taken by the federal government to ensure for women equal opportunities with men in all aspects of Canadian society. That Commission was instructed by the government of Mr. Pearson. After two and a half years, it has reported in lengthy detail and raises complicated and interlocking questions of policy.

I do not think it is any secret that this government maintains, and constantly updates, a listing of our chief

[Mr. Matte.]

priorities which we try to follow fairly closely. I think it is true that all Canadian governments have felt, rather uneasily, that perhaps they might have provided more leadership and reform in the provision of opportunity to women. We have in this House done much which affects women, not the least of which has been in respect of divorce and abortion laws. So, we may have been better than most. I must say, however, that while I shall not state precisely where women were on our priority list before, they have recently ascended it as fast and as far as any ski tow goes up Whistler Mountain.

There are many specific things this government has done and will do. They are important and will have a far-reaching effect not only for women but for the improvement of Canadian life in general. I wonder, though, if they provide all or even very much of the answer to the question of the inclusion of women as full and equal partners in Canadian society. That is the real issue, even more than the specifics of pension provisions, minimum wages or special hiring practices.

A prime issue for society in the contemporary world is the inclusion of women in the society of modern Canada, or the inclusion of the young, or the poor, or the old, in fact the inclusion of all those who have not been quite brought in, all those who do suffer discrimination. Our own Parliament, in terms of social background, is not fully representative of the people of Canada. Certainly by denying women, and all the other groups, we deny our society. The Public Service, the public bureaucracy at all levels of government, does not represent well the Canadian mosaic—nor do trade unions, major private enterprises and other institutions. So, I guess no one group in society can point a finger at the other. Certainly, we, as governments, must remove the legal and employment barriers to those who are excluded as the first step.

There is also the question of how a society looks at itself, and how that can be altered. What about the attitudes of all the institutions of our society such as the family, the neighbourhood, the trade union, the firm and public enterprise? How do they mould and motivate individuals? How and why do they exclude large segments of our population from their activities? More importantly, how and when will they take positive steps for inclusion, not exclusion? I think it is certain, as the Prime Minister said last week, that we do know that immense numbers of talented persons have not had a chance to compete and contribute in the fields of their choice, whatever bent their talents might have disclosed. But why are they not in the mainstream? In my opinion, the answer rests in the degree of commitment by which a society and its individual members and groups pursue objectives of equity and social justice. In other words, the buck quite properly passes back to Canadians individually, singly and in groups.

I am increasingly aware of the truth that national objectives of equity and social justice remain words until people support policies and measures that are designed to increase equity. As an example, I cite measures such as tax reform where a little generosity of spirit would be welcome. In my own field of responsibility, housing, we have sought, to the best of our ability, to shift our