

*Motions*

to boycott this committee and the process. Fortunately, Mr. Speaker, that letter was ignored, and the committee did its work. The committee worked incredibly hard. We had hearings across this land for many months. We heard from over 250 organizations and individuals. We received well in excess of 500 written submissions.

● (1550)

Incredibly, and I say incredibly, the committee was able to arrive at a unanimous report after vigorous debate and discussion, a report which reflected our views of the importance and the need for fundamental changes arising from the coming into force of Section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

We recommended sweeping and major changes to federal laws and policies in a whole range of areas touching many aspects of Canadians' lives. In all, in our report, we made some 85 recommendations. As I say, many of these recommendations would fundamentally alter the social and economic fabric of the nation. It would, in effect, put flesh on the bones, the skeleton of Section 15. Were these recommendations to be implemented, it would ensure that Canadians would not be forced into the courts of the land to fight for their fundamental rights and freedoms.

That landmark report was tabled by our committee in October last year. We awaited with great interest the response of the Government to these recommendations. That response was finally tabled by the Government this month on March 4, and it is interesting to note the title of the Government's response. Our committee report was entitled "Equality for All" and that was our objective. The response of the Government was entitled "Toward Equality". I suggest that that accurately reflects the failure of the Government to move with respect to a number of very key and critical recommendations of the sub-committee on equality rights.

There is no question that in a number of significant social areas in particular the Government has in its report, in its response to our committee, made significant advances on paper. The words are there. The Government is saying very clearly that it is prepared to commit itself to important changes in response to the unanimous recommendations of this report. My colleague, the Hon. Member for Broadview-Greenwood (Ms. McDonald) is going to speak on a number of areas of concern as well as colleagues from all sides of the House, I hope, in support of this motion of concurrence, and I would hope we could have a unanimous vote of support for this important report which, after all, was concurred in unanimously by members of the committee.

I intend in the few minutes remaining to me to highlight some of the areas that we as new Democrats are most concerned about in the Government's response. In many ways the Government response, in underlining time and time again the need for further action and study, falls far short of what we as a committee have recommended.

The committee recommended, for example, major changes in the area of the Canadian Human Rights Act. We recommended concrete, specific amendments. What is the response

of the Government? It says it will give careful consideration to the fundamental question as to whether the Canadian Human Rights Act should be amended in the direction recommended by our committee.

The Government talks about study, consideration and further consultation. That was to have been the purpose of our committee. We do not need further study, further consultation and further consideration. What we need in the area of equality is action. That was precisely what the Equality Rights Committee recommended.

Let us look at some of the groups most affected by the recommendations of the Equality Rights Committee. A majority of citizens in this country, 52 per cent, are women. Yet in many respects women are still second-class citizens in the social and in the economic sphere in particular. What were the recommendations of our committee, and how did the Government fall short? With respect to important changes in the area of unemployment insurance, the Government has said: "More study. Wait until the Forget Commission has released its reports before our recommendations in the area of maternity and parental benefits are going to be adopted."

In the area of pensions, the Government has rejected a number of our key recommendations for improving pensions. After all, Members of this House know well that it is elderly women who are the poorest in our society. It is elderly women who must have improved pensions. The Government has refused to accept a number of our key recommendations in this area.

Let us look at one of those recommendations. We said that it was wrong and discriminatory for the Government to extend a spouse's allowance to the poor between the ages of 60 and 65 and that that extension, which did not apply to single poor or to the divorced poor between the ages of 60 and 65, was in breach of the law of the land, that it violated the Constitution in Section 15.

The Government says: "Yes, we acknowledge that there are a significant number of poor men and women", and I say, Mr. Speaker, particularly poor women between the ages of 60 and 65, "but we cannot afford equality for these poor people between the ages of 60 and 65".

You cannot put a price tag on equality, Mr. Speaker. It is fundamentally wrong for the Government to say: "Yes, we acknowledge that the Charter calls for equality in this area but we are not prepared to accept it because it will cost us too much". Where are the priorities of the Government when it is prepared to extend a half a million dollar capital gains tax exemption to the wealthy and at the same time says it cannot afford basic economic equality for poor men and women in Canada between the ages of 60 and 65?

The Government has failed to act on our recommendations with respect to amending sex based mortality tables and to replace them with unisex mortality tables. The Government has failed to act with respect to our strong recommendation that women give full access to all trades and occupations in the Canadian Armed Forces, that women be judged as