

Supply

Mr. Deans: I want to suggest to the Parliamentary Secretary who is blabbering on about something, and he obviously should know better, that he should try to make it clear to the Government that we did not pass the Charter of Rights and Freedoms so that it would apply only to those for whom it happens to be convenient. That was not the purpose of this Charter which hangs proudly in most offices, most schools and most public buildings. We did not say that there are five or six classes of people in Canada, some of whom have protection under the Charter and others who do not. We did not approve of disciplining people for doing things the Government does not like, notwithstanding the fact that those people clearly have that right under the Charter. We did not say that it would be acceptable to use a collective agreement between two parties at the federal level to discipline someone for doing something to which they are entitled under the Charter.

The Parliamentary Secretary should take this issue seriously because it can affect any employee in any Crown agency at any time. There is absolutely no doubt that we stated quite clearly that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the rights and freedoms set out in it, subject only—which is the key—to such reasonable limits prescribed by law. I suggest to the Parliamentary Secretary that the freedom of speech, unless it is in violation of a law, is absolutely guaranteed.

Mr. Forrestall: Right. You could find out the facts, but that would not be convenient to your argument.

Mr. Deans: I contend that in the case of this woman there is no such law that prohibits her from exercising the expression of her views about the Government or anything else that is not prohibited. It is time the Government understood that.

This is not simply a question of a woman's battle for her job. This is a case of a 30-day suspension without income. Such a suspension means you would worry yourself sick over whether you can make your rent payment, your loan payment or whether you can afford to buy enough food. This is a 30-day suspension for criticizing the Government. We would be up in arms if this took place in Russia; but no, this is Canada. I understood that we in Canada did not take such punitive action against people. I understood that we treated people fairly.

I have seen Members rise in the House time after time to argue that it is the right of everyone, subject only to such reasonable limits as prescribed by law, to criticize the Government as they so wish. I remind the Parliamentary Secretary that it is not so long ago that the Conservative Party, when in opposition, was screaming at the Government about a man who was employed by the Government and whose responsibility it was to enforce the change to metric in Canada. He went out and spoke against that change. The Conservative Party argued, I believe quite strongly, and perhaps even with some justification, that the penalty the man had to endure was wrong. I ask the Parliamentary Secretary to tell me that what this woman did was in any way different or was as bad as what was done by a man who ultimately became a leadership

candidate for the Conservative Party at its convention when it chose its now leader, the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney).

● (1540)

I see a double standard which I find, quite frankly, very disturbing. It is not simply a question of this woman and her rights, it is a question of whether the Government of Canada believes that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which all of us who were here supported in this House at its final point, means anything. The question is whether we believe the right to free speech is a fundamental right of every citizen and cannot simply be frittered away by the whim of someone sitting in a corporate boardroom. The point is whether that fundamental right will be upheld by the Parliament of Canada and whether the Government of Canada will insist that that right be upheld by agencies of Government.

I say to the Parliamentary Secretary if he believes, as I do, that when we passed that law we intended that everyone not prohibited by law should be given the benefit of protection under the Charter, and particularly under the freedom sections, then he surely must understand that a letter of complaint of the type written cannot be used as justification for denying anyone the right to express his or her honest opinion about the actions of the Government which governs a democracy in which he or she lives.

Miss Carney: Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of questions to ask the Hon. Member. I believe he has been informed that the Minister of Transport is at a federal-provincial conference meeting today.

Mr. Deans: No, I was not informed of that.

Miss Carney: He could have found that out by calling his office. The point has been made by the Government that this particular complaint—may I say to the Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps) that it is our 10 minutes.

Mr. Boudria: The time belongs to the House.

Ms. Copps: That's right.

Miss Carney: Do I have the floor, Mr. Speaker?

This complaint was handled in a routine manner by the Executive Correspondence Unit of the Department of Transport. I would like to point out at this time that so far this year there have been 53 referrals to Air Canada. In 1985 there were 144 referrals, 1984 there were 114 referrals and in 1983, the year we were not in power, there were 159 referrals to Air Canada. Does the Hon. Member suggest that these were all from one Conservative to another or does he understand the fact that this is a routine matter handled in a routine way?

Mr. Boudria: You would have to be pretty naive to believe that.

Mr. Deans: Mr. Speaker, I can see that the Hon. Member has lost her touch in terms of asking questions.