

Status of Women

A second and important group is homemakers, the women who work long hours, in the home, have few holidays, no benefits, and no pay. They are probably the hardest-working group in Canada. It does not matter from which economic group they come, "housewives" lack confidence and feel they are useless. If they are asked in a survey what they do, they say, "I don't work. I am just a housewife." This is a deplorable situation this kind of negative stereotyping which society imposes on women who work in the home. These people do a very important job of raising children and managing homes.

I hope we will bring in day care so that women who want to, can go out to work. We also need pension coverage and some form of pay for parents so that some may choose to remain at home and rear their children.

I would now like to refer the minister and hon. members of the House to an interesting task force on older women conducted by a women's rights committee. This was associated with the NDP in British Columbia and it travelled to the remote areas of the province. It involves local women in a non-partisan way. They were able to speak about their concerns and their desperate conditions. They organized ongoing women's groups in their own communities. This kind of task force should be a function of a national advisory council to reach out to older women from remote communities across Canada. Action must be taken to raise the incomes of older women who are the most poverty-stricken of any group in Canada. Decent housing, adequate pensions and accessible transportation systems must be provided for them.

I talked today with some of the representatives from the Indian Rights for Indian Women movement. They said they felt the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women has been great on research but short on action. The council did not make native women's issues a priority. It was too removed from local groups and issues. In fairness to the council, it cannot be all things to all people. But obviously this indicates there must be more involvement of women in local communities. Native women in particular must be represented if a national women's organization is to be effective.

Next I will speak about immigrant women. Many hon. members probably know, but if they do not know, they should, that immigrant women face double discrimination. They face discrimination as women and discrimination as immigrants. The Immigration Act discriminates against women and should be changed. Settlement services are very limited and unsuited to women's needs. I would be glad to go into this at some time with the minister. Immigrant women who are imported as domestics have no protection and should be able to become landed immigrants after they have put in a certain amount of time in Canada.

Finally I want to mention an important women's issue which has not been dealt with fairly in this House of Commons and which requires action from a national women's organization. We must work for repeal of section 251 of the Criminal Code to allow women who decide to have an abortion to do so legally and safely. I am not saying that we advocate abortion, but women must have a choice. Therefore, abortion must be taken

out of the Criminal Code. This is a highly-charged emotional issue. It has been debated twice in this House through private members' bills since I have been a member. However, I am very disappointed that members from other parties, particularly from the Liberal party, who brought in legislation supposedly in support of women, did not speak in favour of even retaining the present provisions for women to have therapeutic abortions. The members who spoke advocating a cutback and a restriction of the present policy, were all men. Reform of abortion law is an issue on which many Canadian women feel strongly. A movement for repeal should have a national voice through a democratically elected and representative national women's council. I could go on, Mr. Speaker, but I will leave it at that for now.

We in the NDP believe that there is an important role for a reformed Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women or a representative women's organization at the national level which perhaps should be given a new name. We believe it should not be a government appointed body. It should be a group which is truly representative of Canadian women in all walks of life. Therefore we have recommended in our amendment that the membership of a renewed council should be appointed or elected by and from organizations in this country, organizations which are actively involved in women's issues.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bill McKnight (Kindersley-Lloydminster): Mr. Speaker, I take part in this debate with a feeling of sadness that something as important as 51 per cent of our population has been poorly represented by their elected officials in government, which is what prompted the presentation of this motion by the hon. member for Waterloo (Mr. McLean).

I have listened to this debate today. I have heard different sections of society mentioned. I have heard about women in the labour force, and the underprivileged, who are denied their rights, as we all know. But I would like to address my remarks to a segment of our population that has not been defended to this point in time. I refer to the women in rural Canada, not just the farm wives but the farmers; women who run independent farms, women who farm with their husbands or their sons and, in some instances, with the assistance of their daughters. The National Council on Rural Development did a study on rural women. They discovered that the average farm wife works 29 hours a week in the field, in the barns, doing bookkeeping or carrying out some other function in a very productive part of our country, that of food production. We have a growing number of farm men who are holding full-time or part-time jobs off the farm. When they leave the farm, the balance of the burden of producing food falls to their wives or daughters.

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There are still very many farm women who wish to be independent and be recognized as full partners in a farming operation. In 1978, the then spokesman for our party, the Hon. David MacDonald, brought to the attention of this House a