

*Statute Law Amendment Act*

for example, wish to make some very strong statements about the country he is leaving and does not want himself or his family to be prejudiced by the statements he is making. I would suggest that this change, instead of promoting equality, is a step backward. There is no requirement whatsoever for us to deny the right of a potential immigrant or refugee to have a closed hearing at the option of that individual.

● (1650)

However, it is in the area of equality rights that this Bill is most lacking in substance. Indeed, tremendous work was done by women right across this country to persuade the Government to strengthen the provisions of the Charter of Rights, not just in Section 15 but to include as well a very clear statement in Section 28 of the Constitution. Hopes arose that there might actually be some real equality, a real equal rights amendment in Canada for women. But this Government has come forward with a shocking betrayal of the hopes of Canadian women for equality.

I know a number of my colleagues are going to be addressing this question in greater depth, including the Hon. Member for Broadview-Greenwood (Ms. McDonald) who has worked very hard on this question, both as a Member of Parliament and, before she was elected, in promoting equality for women in her capacity as Chairperson of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women. I know that she and other members of my caucus share my concern, my anger, my sense of betrayal because this Government has not moved further.

What has the Government done to promote equality of women in Canada? What it has done in this Bill is to change a total of nine laws. The irony of this approach is that the majority of those changes do not enhance the rights of women, they enhance the rights of men. For example, the amendments would offer the same benefits to husbands and widowers to which wives and widows are now entitled under a number of Acts, including the Merchant Seamen Compensation Act, the Veterans Rehabilitation Act, and several others. It would give marriage settlements made on men the same protection under the Bankruptcy Act from a spouse's creditors as that which women now have. It would remove the possibility of preferred treatment for women under the National Defence Act; that is, the application of the code of service discipline. In short, there is but a single change, one piece of legislation which is being changed by this Government to benefit women, and only one. That change is to the Canada Shipping Act so that a woman who works aboard a ship will have part of her earnings payable to dependants at home, just as a man can do now. That is it. That is the sum total of this Government's response to the demand of Canadian women that they be granted equality—one change in one Act which is virtually of no consequence. What an incredible failure by this Government to take seriously its responsibilities for the promotion of equality of women in Canada today.

I am not going to take a great deal of time to emphasize some of the areas that we in this Party believe this Government should have moved forward in. Some of my colleagues will be elaborating on that point. However, I would remind

Members of this House that women continue to be the victims of discrimination, economically and socially, in many different spheres. A report released just a couple of weeks ago clearly documents the fact that a woman in 1982, working full time, earned on average about 60 per cent of the wage of a working man. This wage gap has not closed, it has become bigger. Federal legislation continues to discriminate against women in many respects. The Unemployment Insurance Act continues to discriminate against pregnant women. I might say that one of the concerns of this House was to overrule the absurd decision of the Supreme Court of Canada in *Bliss* which said that discrimination against people who were pregnant was not discrimination on the basis of sex, even though the only people who can become pregnant are women. Well, we in this Parliament made it very clear that we did not accept that logic, and we had hoped that this Government would have come forward with meaningful legislation to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act and other legislation with respect to pensions to deal with the fact that two thirds of the elderly women in Canada today live in conditions of poverty. But this Government has done nothing.

With respect to discrimination against women, the Government has again moved in a manner which is almost worse than not having moved at all because it gives Canadians the illusion of action, but in fact no meaningful action whatsoever has been taken.

What about the disabled? There is no excuse for further study of the issues of concern to the disabled community of Canada. One of the finest reports ever tabled in this House was the unanimous report of the Special Committee on the Disabled and the Handicapped. I want to salute the contribution of my colleague, the Hon. Member for Beaches (Mr. Young), who will be speaking in the course of this debate and who was a member of that committee. The committee tabled a report which made a whole series of very important recommendations for changes in policy and federal legislation and for encouragement of independent living as well as an end to discrimination in the workplace. There were many other similar recommendations. The studies have been done but what is this Government proposing? The disabled community in Canada appeared before the Special Joint Committee on the Constitution, and I recall vividly as a member of that committee how, day in and day out, they would come to our committee until finally the Government was forced to respond to their cry for full equality. Following the entrenchment of the rights of the disabled in Section 15, this special committee held hearings in cities and towns right across this country. It heard from the disabled and submitted a unanimous report recommending action and changes in the law. We waited with great interest and great hope for the response of this Government to those recommendations. But what did it do? Did it in fact implement, let us say, 50 per cent of the changes recommended? Did it implement three or four of the key recommendations made by the committee? No. The single change made by this Government to assist the two million Canadians who are