

*Adjournment Debate*

part of our workforce but are not able to gain the kind of employment they would be able to gain if they had the kind of language training that certainly male immigrants have access to.

I also have great concerns about the kind of pressure we are putting on the families of immigrant people. I wonder if any of the Members in the House recognize how difficult it is if one has to call a doctor, if one has to have a parent-teacher's interview or if one has to look for or ask about food products and cannot do it because they cannot communicate in the language. I certainly have some experience in hospitals where we had patients who could not communicate in either of the official languages. It was very difficult for them. I might suggest that it would also be less costly for us in the health care system because, of course, recovery is much quicker if communication skills are available.

It seems to me to make sense rather than going through the courts, and that was the purpose of my question originally. The Minister did not respond except to tell us the numbers of people who were in language training courses through the CJS program. I am very concerned about that because now we know that we are in the process of having legal action taken against the Government. I do not think this Government, or any other Government in Canada, would want to see legal action where it seems to me very evident it is going to find itself in discriminatory circumstances. However, my major concern is that the expenditures of funds would be in defence of a biased policy rather than toward eliminating discrimination and making life much more equitable for these people.

Another interesting statistic I have looked at is that up to the age of 55 years, there are about 8 per cent more immigrant women in the workforce than there are native-born Canadian women. It seems to me that these are women who will be in the labour force and, therefore, they are going to need the language skills. I am very concerned about the fact that over the years the problem has been identified over and over again, as I say, since the late 1960s, and we still have not done anything to change this policy. Just a fairly simple change in policy would be the kind of thing that we would be looking for. It would stop the legal action that is apt to be there. It would also certainly give us a sense that the way we are treating our immigrant women is equitable to the way we treat our male immigrants. We always wanted to see ourselves as a country that welcomes people.

*[Translation]*

The Government offers language training to immigrant men and women it feels will enter the labour market. Immigrant women who are coming to join a partner in Canada are excluded from the program if the Government assumes they will stay in the home. This policy ignores the fact that these women must communicate in English or French to lead their daily lives.

Furthermore, language training is not offered to immigrant women who have few occupational skills. Immigrant men in

the same category do have access to language courses. This discriminatory policy relegates immigrant women to the ghettos of low-paying jobs.

*[English]*

It seems to me it would be quite simple for the Minister to undertake to change this policy to stop any kind of legal action. I hope that is what the Government wants. That is certainly what New Democrats want to have happen to immigrant women and visible minorities.

**Mr. Benno Friesen (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Employment and Immigration):** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister I can say that we hope litigation will cease. I am not very hopeful that that will happen, regardless of what the Government does. We live in a world in which it is popular to say that you are being discriminated against and popular to go to court. We could have the most flawless program which human ingenuity could contrive and there would still be someone who would say that he or she is being discriminated against.

In her question on November 27 the Member said:

Is the Minister willing or not to allow these people to become part of our daily workforce?

Of course he is. I think the Member made an unfortunate inference in her question. The Government has instituted policies which have created over one million jobs. Almost half of those jobs have gone to women and 80 per cent of those are full-time jobs. Surely the Member will accept the fact that the Government is interested in having women take part in the workforce if they so choose.

• (1805)

The Member also says that the Government's policies are working against immigrant women. I want to read her statistics with regard to this in order that we can discuss concrete data. In fact, the number of training seats available to immigrant women has gone up since we came into office in 1984. In 1983-84 there were 2,123 seats available to immigrant women. There was a slight increase in 1984-85 when there were 2,474 seats available. There were 2,512 seats available in 1985-86 and in 1986-87 there were 2,280 seats available to immigrant women.

With regard to refugee women there has been a 30 per cent increase in seats available.

**Ms. Dewar:** That's because the others were so bad.

**Mr. Friesen:** Of course it is because the others were so bad, but it does take time to bring programs into line with needs. We could not do it on September 5, 1984, the day after we were elected. We began working on it but it does take time to get programs in place. As the trend line shows, it is improving.

I hope the Member will accept the fact that the Government is making a sincere and genuine attempt to improve the lot for immigrant women, and refugee women in particular, that they