

imbalance. As a result of this initiative, I established a departmental advisory committee to deal with all aspects of employment equity.

This group is headed by Barry Carin, Assistant Deputy Minister, Economic Policy and Trade Competitiveness Branch, and draws upon all ranks of the Department. It includes representatives from other departments and the private sector so that we can have the benefit of the experiences of others and the solutions they have brought to these common issues. The purpose of the committee is not just to study the issues, but to propose dynamic and innovative ideas to enable the advancement of women in the Department. I would urge interested employees to address their comments or questions to the Employment Equity Unit or to Barry. I look forward to receiving recommendations from this advisory group soon.

To date, progress in achieving equal opportunity in the workplace has been characterized by periods of advances and setbacks for women at work, waves that have propelled or held back entire generations or particular employment groups of women.

In Canada and elsewhere, women have for decades faced enormous difficulties when they began to enter the paid labour force. Often, the only careers available to them were extensions of their domestic roles—such as teaching or nursing—at much lower rates of pay than their male counterparts.

In spite of this, women are beginning to break down barriers which have delayed their full participation in male-dominated professions and levels, such as the foreign service and the executive group. Women engaged in fighting these obstacles are the trailblazers of today.

As I mentioned earlier, when women first joined External Affairs, they were hired as clerks even if they actually performed the duties of officers. At the time, this was not considered unusual or unfair. Nor was it considered out of the ordinary to demand that female rotational employees resign upon marriage—no matter whether their partner wished to accompany them, place their own careers on hold, and provide the support then expected of a rotational spouse. Many prominent women employees of the Department started out as members of the administrative support group. Some of these women are featured in the photo exhibit and are very much part of the Department's oral and written history.

Certainly the full acceptance of women into the foreign service on an equal basis with men is a relatively recent phenomenon. But we still must remember that, despite the introduction of added flexibility in the workplace, balancing work and family responsibilities remains particularly challenging, especially in the foreign service.