

Supply

● (1700)

Mr. Kilgour: I believe, Mr. Speaker, your colleague this morning ruled we should not make a comment about the number of Members here or not here, and I think that is the question. There are a lot of Hon. Members not present on this side, and a lot of Hon. Members not present on the other side. I do not think the Hon. Member can expect us to fill the galleries this afternoon. That is not our responsibility.

The trouble with the Bill which was proposed last summer, although it was a step forward by the Government, and its heart was in the right place—I admit that freely and openly—was that it was not as good as it should be, and I believe the Hon. Member will also recognize that fact. I looked at that Bill and I looked at the Bill of Senator Kennedy in the United States Senate, and I hope the Parliamentary Secretary will go to the new Minister of Justice (Mr. MacGuigan) and persuade him that Senator Kennedy's Bill is much better than the one the Parliamentary Secretary brought in last summer. I hope that the Government will do something about it quickly because child pornography is not a joke in this country. It is something, I submit, which should be a priority of Government. I believe we could pass it in the House in a day, if the Government brought in a Bill which fights child pornography. I am sure that the Hon. Members of this House would pass such a Bill very, very quickly. We in the Opposition cannot bring forward Bills, as the Parliamentary Secretary knows. It is something that this Government should do with all maximum speed.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I will take my theme from my colleague, the Hon. Member for Willowdale (Mr. Peterson), that the resolution deals with a range of issues which are of very critical concern to the well-being of this country, that is, the status of women and the ways in which we must define their opportunities for greater equality and a definition of their role in society. I would like to change, though, if I might, the focus of the day from that of the previous Hon. Member who dealt exclusively with questions of pornography, and speak about an issue which I believe is very much at the base of the issue of equality for women, and that is the question of employment.

There is no question but that the economics of women in this society is one which must be faced, and faced with a great deal of candid scrutiny, both in terms of where we have gone in the past and where we should go in the future. I would like to begin by refuting the assertion made in the resolution that this Government has not attempted to respond to specific questions. Certainly it is true we have not solved the problem but it is not true to say we have not cared. There has been a great deal of time and attention paid as to how we could address ourselves to the very long, traditional and conventional biases and discriminations which have existed in the system for generations, in fact, for centuries. I would feel that Hon. Members of the Opposition might be kind enough to accept and acknowledge that those underlying hard, obdurate elements of discrimination which have been around for so long,

are not subject to a miraculous panacea which can be implemented in a matter of weeks or even in some cases years. It must be something which is worked at in a very diligent way.

I would like to address those issues, in part, because I believe many of the other areas mentioned in the resolution, such as pension reform, pornography and relations of families in society, are matters which are now receiving a high level of leadership from our present Minister responsible for the status of women. Perhaps no one in this House can speak better than I about the volatility and sensitivity of those issues, Mr. Speaker. But I would like to indicate that I feel the present Minister has accomplished a great and significant step forward in those areas and does provide in our Government a high degree of sensitivity to those issues in a way which I think is exemplary, and is providing all of us with a very profound and a very useful set of directions in which we must go.

However, I would like to point out my own continuing concern and interest in the issue of women's employment because in our own Department we have a special responsibility to provide some sense of leadership in this area. I would like to take the opportunity in the House to outline what I see the problems to be and to share the kinds of concerns I have, as well as to indicate to Hon. Members of this House the initiatives which we are taking and where we would welcome their support and involvement in trying to make those initiatives work.

To begin with, we must face the ageless problem which women have always faced, that of being in the job ghetto. For a long period of time women were basically confined in society to a role which did not even permit them to work in occupations which were considered to be the natural preserve of men. Fortunately, that is beginning to change. We have gone through a really remarkable and critical transformation, if you look at the history of this country. In the 1950s some 20 per cent of women in this country worked. That figure is now closer to 60 per cent. In fact, Mr. Speaker, what is even more dramatic is that in the rest of the decade of the 1980s, women will make up close to 70 per cent of the new workers coming into the new work force. They will represent almost two out of every three workers coming into the work force and, therefore, will represent the best potential we have in terms of new people with new skills, aptitudes, and a freshness of approach, who will help this country adapt to the very profound changes which are taking place in our industrial structure. In order for that to happen, Mr. Speaker, there must be ways in which women can break out of the conventional mould. It is still true and still very tragic that about 60 per cent of women working are working in fields which are classically considered to be the preserve of women, primarily in service and clerical occupations. There continue to be limits to a high degree of access to the non-traditional areas for women. I can point to the apprenticeship programs which are administered by our provincial Governments where they consider it to be a great achievement if 5 per cent of the enrolment in machinist courses, electrician courses or high technology courses are women. That is not the way they are going to break out of the ghetto trap they are in now.