

Supply

We have a situation in this country of women making far less than men in the workplace. The majority of elderly Canadian women are living below the poverty line. That situation is a disgrace and a reflection of the economic principles under which this country is operating. Nearly 39 per cent of the single parent families headed by women are low-income families. Yet less than 7 per cent of families headed by single men are poor. This shows the disparity. The average income of families headed by women is about \$15,000 a year whereas the average income of families headed by men is \$29,000. The average working woman with a full-time job earns about 60 per cent of what the average working man earns.

To compound those horrendous statistics, we had the spectre of both the Official Opposition and the Government implementing a restraint program. This may have been popular publicly. The restraint program was brought in under Bill C-124. When you look at the effect that Bill had on women, it is reflective of the attitude that the Official Opposition and the Government have concerning women. Bill C-124 is part of the infamous six and five program. It effectively eliminated bargaining rights, particularly for women. It was through negotiation that many of the necessary benefits were won. Bill C-124 prohibits negotiations on many maternity leave clauses for various sections of the Public Service. Clauses protecting women, particularly those pregnant, from the hazards of video display terminals in noisy, poorly ventilated buildings were also terminated by the restriction of bargaining rights. Clauses giving some protection against sexual harassment in the workplace were also negated. Equal pay for work of equal value clauses were also negated by Bill C-124. Clauses protecting women from discriminatory employment practices, such as recruitment, selection, training, promotion, classification and lay-off were also undermined by Bill C-124. This Bill was actively pursued by the federal Government in its dealing with the public, not because the Government looked at the Bill as being necessary or fair, but because the Government sensed that within the public there was a sense of insecurity, a fear of recession, and a fear about the size of the budget deficit. The Liberal Government felt, therefore, that it had a popular issue.

Unfortunately, the people most affected by Bill C-124 were women because of the six and five percentage restriction on wage increases in 1983 and 1984. The people most affected by that restriction will obviously be the low-income earners in the Canadian workplace, which just happen to be women. Rather than just happening to be women who are the low-income earners, I wonder whether it is a deliberate attempt by Governments and private industry to restrict women from gaining sufficient employment to allow them to support themselves and their families if they are single parents.

● (1140)

I am proud to say that the NDP took the initiative some time ago to set up a task force on older women. The Opposition, in its motion, is supporting a long-time NDP proposal for a parliamentary committee to be set up to deal with women's issues in order to determine how the Government and the private sector are dealing with those issues and what can be done to improve working conditions, pensions, restricting

sexual harassment in the workplace and how to help single women raise families.

The NDP task force visited 13 communities from coast to coast, listened to 150 briefs and received 1,300 questionnaires on the issues that were most important to women. Pension reform is a main issue that has already been discussed at length in Parliament. There have been approximately 17 different pension studies conducted in the last five years. The Government task force on pension reform recently tabled a green paper that has led to a pension task force of the House of Commons. That is a task force that we are pleased to be involved with. We certainly have some definite ideas about what pension reforms should take place.

However, pension reform is not women's only concern. Women are concerned about income, job availability, as well as those jobs that are not available to them. Income support is definitely a key issue, not only for women but for all Canadians at a time when the unemployment rate is 12 per cent and close to two million people are out of work. Income support is not only important for women but for all people in the workplace who are trying to raise families.

Another area involves women's contributions to pension plans. Obviously, women who are not working cannot become involved in an employee-sponsored pension plan. As well, if they have a low income, the pension at the end of their working life is not as high as it would be if they were earning a greater income that would give greater pension benefits.

Another concern faced by women is lack of training and the opportunity for training for new technologies or professions such as engineering, which would provide women with the leadership skills and educational training that are necessary to see them take their rightful positions in the Canadian workplace.

As well, there is a lack of job opportunities for women who attempt to re-enter the work force after they have spent some time in the home raising children. After the children have left home or have started school, women have difficulty finding employment because their educational training which they had received earlier is not sufficient.

Our task force also heard very informative briefs about such issues as discrimination by sexist and ageist employers, the problems of single parenthood and a number of other issues dealing with income. We have heard about the whole area of employment with respect to women in low-paying jobs—also job ghettos—where they have had very little opportunity in terms of negotiation with their employers. Often they are working in non-unionized businesses or shops, earning low wages with very little protection from sexual harassment and health and safety dangers in the workplace. Women are provided very little protection in those areas.

I would like to elaborate on the issue of pensions. I have been fortunate to be assigned to the pension task force on behalf of the NDP. While I have heard much of the input that will be given from reading the numerous reports on pensions