

*Canada Labour Code*

employees of some 40 Crown corporations and all employees in the Public Service. Those workers come to approximately 10 per cent of the Canadian labour force. That is how many will be directly affected by this legislation.

However, the importance of the legislation is just not in the number of people who will be affected. It is also vital in that it has the capability of a demonstration effect. It will show what can be done in those areas of federal jurisdiction to improve the situations in which people work, and it will set an example for industry, not only in the private sector but with respect to people who are employed in provincial jurisdictions. If that demonstration effect is carried out, then actions will really speak louder than words. However, as I said, Mr. Speaker, these actions have been a long time in coming.

Not only is this Bill slow in being brought forward, but in looking at the various amendments which are being put forward I would say that it is much stronger in dealing with some issues than it is with others. There are certain areas in this Bill which are notably weak. I have, as I mentioned the other day, particular concern about the way this Bill deals with issues which are of particular concern to women. It does take into cognizance the fact that there has been a tremendous growth of women in the labour force, a growth which has happened in all areas of the labour force. Women now account for over 40 per cent of the present labour force and it is interesting to note that it is predicted that in the decade ahead of us at least six out of every ten new entrants to the labour force will be women. It is important that we come to grips with some of the issues which affect women the most.

One of the issues which is dealt with in this particular Bill is the increased possibility of sexual harassment. That becomes more of a possibility as we see women entering into non-traditional sectors of the workplace. It is, therefore, vital that we not only come to grips with this issue but that we try to define the problem in a way in which it has not been seriously addressed in the past. If we can come up with the proper definition and the proper processes of carrying that definition through, it will be then more possible than it has been in the past to have cases of sexual harassment referred to the Human Rights Commission and dealt with under the Human Rights Act. The importance of coming to grips with this issue, Mr. Speaker, cannot be underestimated.

What is needed is to provide a formal process for action against sexual harassment and to also include employers in anti-harassment programs, because they are on the front lines and are able to develop and implement appropriate programs. Therefore, employers have to be involved in this whole area.

I want to point out, however, Mr. Speaker, that it goes beyond what we can set down in terms of definitions, and even legal processes, because sexual harassment is an affront to a person's dignity. There is no question about that. It not only diminishes the individual herself but it can also have a tremendous impact on the way in which that person is able to perform her work. It has an impact on the conduct of work and on the way that an individual is able to behave. That in turn has a very direct correlation to a person's promotion and the way in

which a person is able to be advanced in the workplace. All of these factors are interrelated. That is why it is so very critical.

I would say to the Minister that these amendments are a good first step, but they are only a first step. I want to add a note of caution because there is no single definition or single set of legal processes which will eliminate this problem overnight. It is going to take education and it is going to take time, we know that. That is why I wish these amendments had come in three years ago when they were first promised. We would then be that much further down the road toward the elimination of sexual harassment. However, it is a very critical issue and I want to see it dealt with.

Another area which the Bill addresses to some extent, and one I am happy to see being raised, is the area of proposed amendments to the child care provisions. The present requirement of 12 months' continual employment prior to being eligible for maternity leave is being reduced to three months. In addition, there is a proposal for a further 24-week period of unpaid leave, so that employees, whether male or female, have the choice to assume the responsibility of caring at home for a new child, whether natural or adopted, during those first critical six months. Also of note is that the 24 weeks may be split between the two parents. I feel that is a truly fair provision which reflects the dual responsibility of parents in the raising of children. It is only fair also that when an employee is away on child care or pregnancy leave, pension and health and disability benefits, as well as seniority and opportunities for promotion, continue if the employee so chooses.

Finally, Sir, the childcare leave would be at the discretion of the employee, and that is a good move. No employer could dismiss, suspend, demote or lay off an employee who chooses to take leave. There can be little doubt that these amendments relating to childcare or pregnancy leave, as well as those I mentioned relating to sexual harassment, more adequately reflect the role of women in the workforce. It puts an end to the present set-up which not only fails to protect women but, I would say to you, Sir, in fact penalizes them for having children or, indeed, even for being female. Therefore, I see these amendments as an improvement. However, what is unfortunate is that similar progressive amendments are not proposed in other areas of the labour force which are undergoing tremendous change.

I see that it is one o'clock, Mr. Speaker, and I will continue with that matter later.

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Herbert):** Order. It being one o'clock, I do now leave the chair until two o'clock this afternoon.

At 1 p.m. the House took recess.