

*Government Orders*

women because they would deny the opportunity to a woman who was the victim of sexual harassment from being able to leave her job and collect unemployment insurance.

For the record, that is just not the case. That is not the case now and it will not be the case in the future. Indeed, let me remind my colleagues that in October 1989—and I know many of the members were here in the House at that time—we had the debate about unemployment insurance and amendments were made to the act to provide for specific definitions of just cause, reasons that would continue to make someone eligible for unemployment insurance. At that time a very specific provision was added to the act to be very clear that one of the grounds for just cause would be sexual or other harassment. That was a very important amendment.

I looked up the voting record on that and it is interesting. I was present and certainly voted for it and indeed my colleagues from the NDP voted for it. However, quite surprisingly, the members of the Official Opposition, the Liberals, voted against it. I never have been able to quite understand why that occurred.

That has been the case. Sexual harassment has been and continues to be a just cause for an individual to leave his or her job and be able to collect unemployment insurance. Indeed, of course this bill continues in that effect.

The debate around sexual harassment has been interesting as well. I think on balance it may be a very productive debate in that it is bringing to the public's attention just the fact that this issue exists. It has long been my view that one of the difficulties we face is that for many—and I am speaking primarily of women, although not exclusively because men too can be the victims of sexual harassment in certain circumstances—it is obviously a very traumatic and terrible thing. Often women have not wanted to talk about it and have just said: "I don't want anything to do with it, I just want to get out of this situation and get on with my life".

I sympathize with that and truly understand that, but it only perpetuates the problem because it does not bring the issue out into the open. It does not enable the

individual employer or society at large to be able to do anything about it.

If we are really going to come to grips with the issue of sexual harassment—and we are talking particularly of the workplace—we have to make it transparent. We have to ask those women or those victims to speak out against it. That is the issue we talk about generally with regard to violence against women. It will not stop until we bring it out into the open. That is when we can really start to take those measures.

Sexual harassment of course is against the law. The Canadian Human Rights Commission very clearly makes that point. In ideal circumstances in many cases employers themselves have very specific guidelines and procedures through which an employee can go to get redress or hopefully be able to deal with the problem internally. That is obviously what we all encourage. All employers should have those kinds of guidelines with an independent person within the work place to whom victims can go, even if they are just disturbed by comments rather than actions. They can then bring the people together and make sure everyone understands the situation. Employers should have the appropriate training and orientation programs within the work place so people understand how language or actions can poison the work place and be offensive to people.

There are some very delicate issues around that. Sometimes what one person may perceive as harassment another does not. You will not really deal with that unless you get people talking around the table.

It was extremely interesting in my previous department when we got people around the table. Some people said: "I did not know doing that would be offensive to anyone. I am certainly prepared to change my ways." Obviously that is the ideal way to deal with these situations but it is not always possible. Some small companies do not have those procedures.

I want to make it very clear that no one, woman or man, should have to continue in employment as a victim of sexual harassment. There may be people watching today or reading this transcript who are in that situation. If there is no way within their work place to resolve the situation, they are absolutely and legitimately within