

Supply

When I talk to the women who are in these programs—in fact, I am going to a graduation ceremony again next week, I believe—the question is, once they have done this training and are entering into the workforce, what is going to happen now? One of the problems I still see is that many of the women will still not have a high enough skill level to get jobs which are going to pay enough to really make that much of a difference, to enable them to look after child-care costs and really get ahead. I have made a recommendation to the Minister that in our job training programs we have to look at ensuring that the programs are long enough and the skill level is high enough for the mature woman re-entering the workforce so that she can look forward to getting a job which is going to pay enough to give her that start and provide some opportunities for economic equality.

The next area, of course, is access to employment, because unless women have full access to employment, they are never going to have economic equality. That, of course, is where the employment equity legislation, the first legislation ever introduced by a federal Government in this country, comes into play. I know that many companies are working on plans now. They recognize they are going to have to make changes. The Minister of Supply and Services (Mrs. Vézina), under her program, has already refused to sign contracts with companies which do not put in place employment equity programs. Employment equity programs will help to give women that start, that access into the job market, and provide them with fair treatment.

• (1550)

Of course along with that there must be equal pay for equal work. I had thought that it was no longer an issue in the country, but I was surprised to read recently the mid-1984 survey by the Geneva-based Economic Monde Forum, which rated Canada as being twenty-third out of 28 nations on the extent to which equal pay is paid for equal work. I think this means that a lot of work still needs to be done.

Of course the provinces are involved in that area, but we need not think that the challenge is over. We still need initiatives to deal with it.

Turning to child care, it is one of the top issues on the agenda of the Government and on the agenda of women. Until we are able to deal effectively with the issue of child care, women will not have the real freedom to make choices on whether to go into the workforce or will not be able to look forward to a well paying job. They will always have to compromise their potential if they do not have access to appropriate child care.

I was pleased by the efforts not only of the parliamentary task force but of the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) and his provincial colleagues to address the problem seriously. It will not happen overnight, but it is important to start to put in place the elements which will provide for a fair child care system.

I should now like to turn to pensions. Certainly the older women in the country are facing a problem in this regard. We know that to be poor in the country is to be old and to be a woman. However, we have done a lot on the issue of pensions. We have made amendments to the Canada Pension Plan. We brought in spousal allowance for widows between the ages of 60 years and 64 years. We have amended the Pension Benefits Standards Act.

When we look at women in the workforce now, we recognize that there must be more flexibility and more portability in pensions. I have been working in the workforce for 26 years, and I do not have a pension. Each time I moved from job to job, the pensions were not portable. I think this is true for a lot of women. Because of changes in our family circumstances, we go in and out of the job market at different times in our lives. We need pension systems which accommodate that, in addition to the excellent RRSP legislation that enables women to contribute toward a pension plan.

I realize that my time is limited, but there are many things about which I want to talk, including the elements of further action on which I would like to see all of us working together. I think the Government has done a tremendous job, but the challenge is ahead of us.

That plan of action, first of all, would be to influence the attitude of youth toward economic and social realities and the permanent presence of women in the workforce. Second, the Government should act as a model leader and employer regarding employment equity and increasing appointments to boards ultimately to 52 per cent. It must take action on training needs and on child care. I think it should also take action to develop a better data base relating to the impact of broad fiscal measures on women.

In fact, there has been a suggestion that there should be a gender equality index which will provide Governments with a yardstick to measure the relative progress regarding the attainment of economic equality by women.

We should also reassess our income tax provisions in respect of child care, recognizing the contribution which women make in the home, and of a potential credit for women who work in the home through the income tax system. Some suggestions have been made that if we look at the value of a homemaker as being about \$26,000 per year, we might look at a tax credit rather than a spousal deduction paid to women who actually gave rise to the tax benefits.

I think those are some of the issues on the agenda before us. With the commitment which the Government has shown over the past 2.5 years and will show as we proceed through our first, second, third, and fourth terms, I know we will see progress that will ensure that women not only have legal equality, which we basically have now, but that we will achieve the kind of economic equality that we all desire.

Ms. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Hon. Member for her remarks. I think I agreed with most of them, but I should like to make a couple of comments.