

raised on an ongoing basis by Conservative Members in committee and in the House of Commons to indicate our very real and irrefutable interest in having these amendments to the Canada Labour Code brought before the House, debated, examined and passed within this Parliament.

All one must do to determine the long and irrefutable quest of the Conservative Party in this issue is to look at the official records to see how often it has been raised by Members of this side. I recommend this exercise to Members of the New Democratic Party as well so that they can see the number of times this issue has been raised by Members of this Party at times when often their Members were not in attendance.

Mr. Fulton: Tell us about it.

Miss MacDonald: It should come as no surprise that it was a Member of the Progressive Conservative Party who moved this motion on this Opposition Day condemning the Government for acting so slowly to protect employees under federal jurisdiction. That proposal has been cited on a number of occasions today. I stress the point that the amendments which are proposed in Bill C-34, which we have yet to debate at second reading stage, apply to only 10 per cent of the labour force. They apply only to those employees who come under federal jurisdiction and the Public Service. It is an area in which the Government could move. It could provide leadership. The demonstration of that leadership by the Government could lead to improved labour conditions throughout the country. No doubt, it could at least help to avoid unnecessary management labour problems.

One really must castigate the Government for its failure to exercise the leadership in this field which it should have been showing three years ago when the then Minister of Labour promised to produce these amendments in the House in very short order. The Conservative Party supports the provisions of Bill C-34, the amendments to the Canada Labour Code, despite its late introduction and its obvious imperfections.

We are supporting no area more strongly than the changes affecting women in the federally regulated workforce. I would like to concentrate a few remarks on that subject. The number of women in the paid labour force has risen dramatically in recent years. Women now constitute approximately 40 per cent of the labour force. It is estimated that six out of every 10 new entrants into the labour force in the next decade will be women. This increasing number of female employees makes it essential that they be more adequately protected from sexual harassment, particularly since women are moving into areas which have been considered non traditional employment for women. At least for a period of time they will be overwhelmed numerically in these areas by their male counterparts.

The proposed amendments to the Canada Labour Code will remove any doubt that may exist that harassment is a form of discrimination. The amendments will emphasize that any complaints of harassment under the Code can be referred to the Human Rights Commission and can be dealt with under the Human Rights Act. The importance of this action cannot be underestimated. There is no doubt in my mind that harass-

ment is a totally inexcusable affront to a person's dignity. It could impede a person's performance and progress in the workplace.

The passage of this Bill and the improvement to it would provide a definition of sexual harassment. That has been one of the problems up to the present time. There has been a lot of confusion as to what that term meant. Just as important as the definition which will be introduced is the fact that employers will be required to develop policies and programs within their places of business to combat sexual harassment on the job. Employers are in a position to recognize problems at work and to take immediate corrective steps to control harassment. Therefore, their participation is essential.

That in itself is not suddenly going to resolve the problem in this field once and for all. It must be recognized that the amendments do not present a magic solution to the problems with regard to harassment. They are a step in the right direction, but only a step. They must be accompanied by a change in attitude. That cannot be legislated and cannot be brought about overnight. It must be done through education and example. That will take time. If these amendments had been introduced, passed and in place four years ago, that would have been a good step toward eliminating the sexual harassment which still exists. That was four years that was wasted when we might have had them in place.

• (1720)

Another amendment that is included in the proposed Bill and which is of great significance to women, is the improvement of child care leave provisions. The present requirement of 12 months continual employment prior to being eligible for maternity leave has been reduced to three months. In addition, there is a proposal for a further 24-week period of unpaid leave so that employees, whether female or male, have an opportunity to assume the responsibility of caring for the child, whether natural or adopted, during that 24-week period. When an employee is away on leave, during that period, his or her pension, health and disability benefits as well as seniority continues if the employee so desires. I think that is a very positive step in the right direction.

Finally, child care leave would be at the discretion of the employee. No employer could dismiss, suspend, lay off or demote an employee due to pregnancy or child care leave. There can be little doubt that these amendments relating to child care and maternity leave are progressive and would greatly benefit both women and men.

I think it is important that we have this debate and get the Bill before us and into committee so that we can also try to do something about its shortcomings. There is one aspect of the Bill which I believe has not really come to grips with the problems in our workplace, that is with regard to the proposed amendments relating to part-time workers. There are about 2.6 million part-time workers in Canada today, almost two million of whom are women. They are currently ineligible for benefits, such as pensions, medical plans, disability insurance. On average, they receive approximately three-quarters of the