

*Equality Rights*

capabilities have been demonstrated in so many areas of our national life, including the House of Commons.

Let us not be panicked by this motion and the understandable desires of the mover and the seconder. We must recognize that at the present time the Armed Forces of Canada have a far larger percentage of women serving in various positions than do other comparable forces in the country. For example, the police forces of Canada have only 3.1 per cent of women in their ranks. Fire fighting organizations have only 1 per cent.

The Canadian Armed Forces have made impressive progress in opening up their ranks and officer positions to women to a degree equalled by very few organizations and activities in our society. We should want to keep the Armed Forces moving in that direction. We should attempt to increase the number of women serving in the Armed Forces and to advance them to positions of seniority, including the rank of general, so that their voices can be heard at all levels and their thinking can be influential up to the highest level. I hope that that day is not far away. We would be very happy to see a woman general at the top level of our Armed Forces. Women have achieved generalship in other countries and we would like to receive the benefit of their leadership in our military service.

**Mr. Robinson:** That's tokenism.

**Mr. Stackhouse:** Anyone who has served as a general will never regard it as a token. I consider that last remark reflective of the depth of debate on the other side.

**Mr. Cassidy:** Look in the mirror, Reg.

**Mr. Stackhouse:** The best interests of the women involved are served by continuing and advancing the policy now in effect.

**Mr. John Reimer (Kitchener):** Mr. Speaker, I, too, would like to add a few comments to this debate on the motion before the House. This is a motion to open all of the occupations and trades in the Canadian Armed Forces, particularly those of a combat nature, to women. I cannot help but wonder why anyone would want to enter into a combat role. Surely our prime objective is to ensure that neither males nor females would have to fight in a war. I do not know why anyone wants to get involved in this in the first place.

I would like to comment specifically on some of the points contained in this motion. We must use a large measure of common sense and pay attention to the basic principles of the Armed Forces when discussing this motion. What in the world do the Armed Forces exist for in the first place? They are not there to provide employment opportunities or to be in the forefront of social change. They are not there to hold little sensitivity groups talking about human rights. The purpose of the Armed Forces is to be there with one single, over-riding objective, that being to protect the security and sovereignty of Canada and to protect the rights and freedoms enjoyed by all Canadians. Everything the Armed Forces does must be directly related to that one over-riding objective. Therefore, we

must ensure that all of the trades and occupations within the Armed Forces serve that one over-riding objective.

Whenever a trade or occupation can be open equally to men and women, we obviously want to do that, as the Canadian Armed Forces are doing today. That is what the Government is committed to. The Government is committed to expanding the role of women in the Armed Forces by ensuring that women will be able to compete for all of the trades and occupations within the forces. The Government has committed itself to pursuing this policy only in a manner consistent with the requirements of the Armed Forces to be operationally effective in the interests of national security.

We must consider some of the facts. My colleague who just spoke mentioned some of these and I would like to reiterate some of them. Canada is already a leader in the western world in the employment of women in the Armed Forces. Today 8.9 per cent of those employed in the Canadian Armed Forces are women. Of the 29,000 positions open to either men or women, 7,400 are occupied by women. Only two countries in the world have a higher proportion of women in their Armed Forces than does Canada, those being Israel with 10 per cent and the United States with 9.5 per cent. Within the next few years the rate of increase of female trainees will put Canada ahead of some of these other nations.

Constant review within the Armed Forces has resulted in an increase in the proportion of occupations in which women participate from 19 per cent in 1971 to the present 65 per cent, resulting in some 29,000 positions now being available to women. As vacancies occur and suitable applicants become available, there will be considerable scope for expanding the present strength of 7,400 women. As a result of the present Charter of Rights, a task force is studying how to implement that within the Department of National Defence today. The result will be that the number of occupations open to women will undoubtedly increase.

● (1730)

Last fall I was a member of the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence which held hearings across Canada concerning renewal of the NORAD agreement. We listened to briefings from various Armed Forces personnel at bases across Canada. I talked with many officers and they were very interested in the equality report, but their interest focused on two topics. One was sexual orientation in the Armed Forces, and the other was women in combat. On the first point all of the officers I talked to were unanimously opposed to the recommendation to prohibit discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. I totally agree with them. On the second point, they were also unanimous that women should never be placed in infantry units or in combat roles where their lack of upper body strength and physical stamina would detract from the mission given to the unit concerned. However, they said that more trades and occupations should be opened to women wherever men and women could compete