

*Industrial Status of Women*

had raised this point in their presentations. I can see that the hon. member has been very busy since that time, because the situation is not the same this year.

The groups that have been making these presentations constitute a very important element of public opinion, and their representations have carried weight. I for one welcome such representations. But I would add this year, quite as bravely as last year, that not one of the groups making representations has brought forward relevant information regarding the nature and extent of the problem as they see it, nor has any of them outlined its position with respect to the substance of the legislation sought. In other words there has been no suggestion as to how we should go about introducing legislation in the federal field. This I feel sure they must be prepared to do when they ask that a law be enacted, because I believe the enactment of a law can be justified only in relation to some clearly defined problem that exists somewhere within our society, whether it applies to women or to men.

In the absence of clear evidence of a problem under federal jurisdiction that warrants this type of action, I am not prepared to support this proposal for legislation at this time. But let me add quickly that I am fully prepared to provide the means for receiving representations as to the need, and how it is felt by those making the representations that a federal law might meet that need. I shall go further and say that I extended to the delegation which met with representatives of the government the other day an invitation to have their representations as to how legislation could best be worked out brought to the attention of the head of our women's bureau, sitting as chairman of the committee looking into this matter.

While my present position in respect to equal pay legislation for federal industries is based upon the considerations I have just outlined, there are one or two things I should like to say about this particular bill. In its main provision it is like several bills that have been introduced in the United States congress, but that body has not yet seen fit to pass any of them.

This bill declares it to be an unfair wage practice for an employer to discriminate between sexes in the payment of wages by paying wages to any female employee at a rate less than the rate at which he pays wages to male employees—and I wish to stress this—for work of comparable character on jobs the performance of which requires comparable skills. There I pause because, without wishing to be disrespectful, I suggest that these words are vague when regulating

the payment of wages. I would ask this. What is comparable work? And what are comparable skills? And, perhaps more important, who is going to decide what is comparable work and what are comparable skills?

Surely these words are open to very wide interpretation. Yet this bill would leave to a commission to be appointed by the minister the task of trying to place a reasonable interpretation on them in any given case, and finally would empower the Minister of Labour to make any order he deems necessary to carry out the recommendation of the commission.

I know that under the rules one must not refer to an earlier debate in the session, but I would call to mind what happened within the last few days, and I would wonder if this uncontrolled power which my hon. friend would place in the hands of the minister of labour, whether in this or any future governments, jibes with the stand so often taken, for instance, by the hon. member for Eglinton (Mr. Fleming). There is no appeal whatsoever from the minister's order, and it is a punishable offence not to comply with it. In our act to avoid discrimination in matters of race, religion or colour we have gone to great lengths to see that checks are made, both before and after the matter is brought to the attention of the minister, and that those allegedly aggrieved persons once again have a chance for appeal. This combination of wide administrative discretion, together with vagueness in expression of the intention of parliament as set out in the bill, hardly seems in keeping with some of the discussion in the house regarding a right to appeal from a minister's decision.

For the reasons I have mentioned, I do not consider a reasonable case has been made to demonstrate the necessity or advisability for this particular bill in the federal field at this time. And I am very specific about those words. I appreciate that there is provincial legislation of a similar nature; but in view of the very limited experience they have had—and my hon. friend who no doubt has investigated this would agree, I am sure that that experience has been very limited—it is not possible to assess its usefulness with any degree of accuracy.

I think it is a reasonable position to take when we say that we should follow the operation of provincial legislation very closely. But until the extent of the problem under federal jurisdiction is more clearly defined, as I hope it soon will be, we should not take premature action which might be