

Adjournment Debate

women in the Public Service are exactly where they were in the early 1970s. The government will say it is involved in the joint union/management study for pay equity. I would like to refer to what the Human Rights Commission had to say about the joint union/management study and pay equity in the Public Service.

It said that administrative delay and bureaucratic infighting remain more the hallmark of the program than any genuine move toward pay equity. It further said that complaints are being held in abeyance, one on behalf of approximately 50,000 employees in the clerical and regulatory group—that is that pink collar ghetto again—and another on behalf of approximately 1,500 members of the nursing group. That is nearly one-quarter of federal Public Service employees who have been before the Human Rights Commission on pay equity complaints.

The commission's report goes on to say that it cannot be ignored, that four years have come and gone and there is still a considerable way to go before there is an adequate program for dealing with sex-based inequities, let alone eliminating them. Progress has in fact been excruciatingly slow. If the federal Public Service cannot handle pay equity, what are its chances elsewhere?

Still referring to the report, the slowness of the process not only creates a bad impression, it casts a shadow on the sincerity of the commitment to the whole concept. We can see nothing to be gained by dragging out the process. Either the government means business on equal pay or it does not.

• (1905)

Government must realize that complaints to the Human Rights Commission are not the best way to deal with mass pay discrimination such as exists in the Public Service. The government must take the initiative where pay and equity exists. It must act as a model employer and initiate action, not wait to react. To date, it has not set much of an example for other employers. It must realize that women are an invaluable and essential part of the labour force who deserve to be paid fair and decent wages. If this government does not mean business

on pay equity, it is clearly not ready to move out of the dark ages and into the reality of today's labour market.

Mr. Bill Kempling (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, the hon. member for Ottawa West recently asked this government whether or not it meant business on equal pay. I want to assure my hon. colleague that not only do we mean business, but that significant progress has been made.

The "hospital services" group has been the focus of much attention with respect to this government's commitment to equal pay. Retroactive pay adjustments totalling \$28 million for the period September, 1980 to July, 1987 have already been implemented. All positions at level 1 and those of seamstresses and community health representatives were re-evaluated using the classification standard for the male comparator group, "general services". Further retroactive wage increases were implemented in July, 1989 for those positions which were found to warrant a higher level.

In addition, the "hospital services" classification standard was revised to mirror the "general services" classification standard. New rates of pay for the revised classifications have been set for the period July to December, 1987 and another set of equal wage adjustments for the period July, 1987 and ongoing is currently being issued to employees.

All this represents significant work to remedy the disparity between these two groups and significant expenditure. The current equal wage adjustments are estimated to be approximately \$12 million.

It is true that not all employees in the "hospital services" group received additional equal pay adjustments. When employees do not earn less wages than their male counterparts, they do not get additional adjustments. The collective agreement process for the "hospital services" group is not yet finalized. Once it is, all employees will receive some increases to their rates of pay as they presently are.

In addition, the Human Rights Tribunal, which sat November 8 to the 17, 1989 to review the implementation of the consent order, will reconvene January 22, 1990. The tribunal is examining whether the employers' actions have removed all systemic discrimination from