

Employment Equity

head-to-head with the then Prime Minister, the Hon. Member for Vancouver Quadra (Mr. Turner), during the debate on women's issues. All of us from every political Party were thrilled to hear that promise made to the women of Canada.

Unfortunately, as with so many of the other promises of the Government, and as with so many other promises of the Prime Minister, he says one thing to the women of Canada and another to the companies of Canada. When it comes time to see which interest group wins out in the struggle for rights and equality it is quite clear that the companies, the multi-nationals—the Imasco's of this world—have won out. The little people, the women of Canada, do not have a chance.

A report released today states that poverty is increasing in Canada. The major groups hurt by poverty include groups of women and children. If we are to address in real terms the question of poverty and the feminization of poverty, the only real way to do it is to implement specific recommendations to deal with the wage gap. For every dollar earned by a man, a woman earns 58 cents, 60 cents or 62 cents depending upon the province. Employment equity legislation with real teeth would not solve that problem today but would send out a message, not only to companies—

● (1240)

Mr. Turner (Ottawa—Carleton): Louder.

Ms. Copps: The Hon. Member for Ottawa—Carleton (Mr. Turner) has told me to speak louder. I will speak louder because I am speaking on behalf of the women of Canada, women who are sick and tired of hearing promises from the Government and sick and tired of hearing the Government say how it is going to do its best to improve the economic lot of women. The statistics which came out today show that women and children are sinking deeper and deeper into poverty. The Government cannot even come to grips with the simple questions of early childhood education and daycare.

A report came across the Table to the Government calling for massive structural changes in the way we deal with early childhood education. The response of the Government was to set up another study group and to name as the chairman of that study group the Hon. Member for Lincoln (Mrs. Martin). When the Hon. Member for Lincoln was first elected, her office was quoted as saying that she was not interested in women's issues because women only made up 1.5 per cent of her riding in any event. This is the person the Government has appointed to chair a new task force on early childhood education.

The Government does not believe in daycare. The Government does not believe that there is a consensus among young men and women that if we are to allow women the opportunity to compete equally, we have to give them the social infrastructure that will permit them to get out into the market-place. Employment equity is just one tool to be used in trying to achieve equality.

No one on either side of the House has ever suggested that a good, strong employment equity Bill would close the wage gap between men and women immediately. That is simply not so. There are many other factors involved, including the education and socialization process and the question of the availability of daycare and support systems for men and women.

It is also fair to say that a strong employment equity Bill which called upon companies to implement mandatory affirmative action and contract compliance would, using the most conservative estimates, close the wage gap by 10 per cent to 15 per cent. This would not mean that the days of equal salaries for work of equal value across the board would be here. But if I were a woman working for a minimum wage in the Province of Ontario and trying to support a child and I were presented with a possibility of having my wages increased by 10 per cent to 15 per cent, I would hail the Government that had the guts to introduce such legislation. I would hail the Government that had the guts to tell companies not only that they will have to prepare plans but that they will not be able to keep those plans a secret in the vaults of their inner sanctums, that they are going to have to expose their plans to public scrutiny and to the scrutiny of the very target groups the Government is trying to address.

Unfortunately, the situation is that the Government showered promises upon the women of Canada during the election campaign. Now when the time comes to deliver on those promises, the Government is unprepared to do anything as simple as having this legislation cover the Government's own Departments. It is hard to imagine saying to private-sector employers that they have an obligation to report and that if they do not report they are subject to a fine of \$50,000, but the Government is exempted and federal Departments are not covered by the same legislation. If you were in business, Mr. Speaker, would you be able to market that concept? Would you be able to tell your customers that you want certain laws to apply to your customers but you want to make sure that you are not covered by them?

What does the federal Government have to hide? What do Conservative Members have to hide? Is it simply that with the Nielsen cut-backs, those who are being moved out of the Public Service are primarily the women who have been the last hired and the first fired? The federal Government's plan to cut back includes the abolition of person-years, but most of the people who are going to be hurt by the Nielsen cut-backs and the so-called attrition or reduction in person-years in the federal civil service are in fact women. Therefore, Conservative Members are not prepared to subject themselves to the same scrutiny that they are prepared to impose upon companies with over 100 employees.

Those people who do not spend their days examining all federal legislation, and I suspect most Canadians fall into that category, have heard the Minister expound on what a wonderful thing this will be for the women of Canada, and they think that the Minister might be honest in her attempt to try to redress the imbalance that exists. However, there are four