

*Private Members' Business*

purse in that regard and to the bottom line as relates to the business we are discussing?

Those are the areas that I mention to the member because I think that when we are discussing legislation there are always the negative aspects as well.

I say to the member that this is something which we on this side of the House feel should be addressed and addressed soon. As members are aware, at the moment there are more and more women working in the work force every day. They are having difficulties working outside the home. At the same time trying to make a living is becoming more difficult.

I say that because, lo and behold, not too long ago in the budget of the Minister of Finance there were some major caps and wage restraints to the Public Service, and probably to all workers in Canada as we struggle to put in place the process that will hopefully, through time, allow this government to get a handle on its deficit.

On the one hand, this government would like to have us believe that wage caps and freezes will improve our bottom line as a country but, on the other hand, members such as the member for Abitibi are looking to improve the Canada Labour Code. Also, even though he did not say so, in this motion he is suggesting that there be some dollar cost. I know that when we put forward motions in Private Members' Business we are not to use that aspect of it, because it is not within our rules to charge dollars to the present day government but to suggest ways of doing it without costing money.

I am suggesting to him and to members that this particular initiative by the member would obviously cost us some dollars. That is not to say that I do not agree with it. I think it is a very important endeavour. I just would like to caution all members that there always is the down side to it.

I would like to reiterate something that happened to me. When I was not too long ago heavily involved in the labour movement, as a union member I represented 6,000 employees. Out of those employees there were 30 women. It was not too long ago in the railway that there was no such thing as a woman conductor, brakeman or engineer.

Lo and behold, we woke up to the modern age and realized that in most cases women made better engi-

neers, conductors and trainmen than some men. However, when that took place, we found something out that we were not aware of before: that there were no washrooms, there were no special rooms for women in the bunkhouses; these private areas that, as men, we never even considered until this hit us square in the face.

Something else took place and I relate it to the member because I think it has merit to what we are talking about today. One of our members who I was representing became pregnant. When you work on the railroad there are some physical difficulties in being a conductor, a trainman or an engineer: you have to get off and on moving equipment; in a lot of cases you have to be very physically fit. This particular woman came to me one day and said that she felt she should be able to take a leave of absence during a certain period of her pregnancy and in her estimation—and also in mine—be able to get paid for it. The railroad at the time—this is not too many years ago; we are just talking about five years ago—said that she could not do that, that if she wanted to become pregnant that was her own business.

It has now changed somewhat in the railroad industry. There was a ruling by the Human Rights Commission relating to pregnant women, to the effect that should they become sick during their pregnancy—such as morning sickness, for example—they should be allowed to take time off work for that. And, through that process, we were able to get this particular young lady on sick benefits under the unemployment insurance program.

However, what people should know is that under that particular program, those weeks of sick benefits went against the weeks that she would automatically have been able to take off as maternity leave. It did not rectify the problem, but it did at least bring home the argument we are having today in the House, and what the member for Abitibi is bringing forward, that there are some unique problems for women in the work force when pregnancy occurs.

I hope I speak for all members of the Liberal Party when I say that it is long overdue that we take a good look at the Labour Code, in particular at the areas that seem to be silent as they relate to women. It seems to me not too long ago that women were not considered to be people who would be in the work force for their whole career, as men are. Now we have come full circle and realize that this indeed is the case.