

Women's rights, opportunities for employment examined

The Government recently tabled in the House of Commons a five-year plan to improve laws affecting women, including those governing maternity benefits, sexual crimes, divorce, pensions and child care.

Called *Towards Equality for Women*, the paper promises an increase in trades training for women, an examination of ways to end sexual harassment in the work place, aid to immigrant women and accountability by management for equal opportunities in the Public Service.

Justice Minister Marc Lalonde, who introduced the plan, also pledged to conduct studies of women in the economy, the impact of social security programs on elderly women and violence against women.

He said that more research would be directed towards occupational and environmental health hazards faced by women, as well as alcohol and drug addiction, nutrition and the safety of contraceptives.

Mr. Lalonde's announcement followed a statement made in February by Minister of Employment and Immigration Bud Cullen, which answered criticisms directed against the Government's position on the employment of women.

Mr. Cullen's statement, which expressed regret over "misunderstanding" of government policies on the matter, included background information on the Government's efforts to improve opportunities for women.

Outreach

A program known as Outreach was created in 1972 as a supplementary tool to improve the employability and access to employment of people with special difficulties who were also unable to benefit from regular manpower services. Women *per se* were not included in the program. However, Outreach does respond to the needs of women who are: experiencing serious difficulty entering or re-entering the labour force; living in isolated or remote communities; native people; chronically unemployed; mentally and physically handicapped; and inmates and ex-inmates.

Because many of the women's Outreach projects were started in 1975 during International Women's Year and the normal duration for funding is three-and-a-half years, many of the projects are

coming to the end of their funding period. All Outreach projects will be reviewed, however, before a final decision is made.

Training allowances

A reduction of the basic training allowance from \$45 to \$10, part of the Government's program of fiscal restraint, applies only to trainees who are living with a fully employed spouse or parent and who are not eligible for unemployment insurance benefits. However, training allowances for certain categories have increased. The allowance is now higher for people with three or more dependants, which benefits many single mothers. If the Employment and Immigration Commission finds that the reduction in allowances is preventing women from taking the training courses they need, appropriate action to remedy the situation will be taken.

Secondary wage earners

In recognition of the changing nature of the family and women's economic role, the Commission no longer uses the term, "secondary wage earners", to describe working women, and is attempting to discourage its use elsewhere.

Some of the recommendations made in a report by the Advisory Council on the Status of Women are under consideration by the Commission, which is examining administrative means of resolving problems of immigrant women employed as domestics. The Federal Government has no power in the areas of labour standards and minimum wages, which fall under provincial jurisdiction.

Unemployment insurance changes

Recent amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act may mean a 20.1 percent reduction in the total number of dollars in benefits paid to women. The Government has calculated a 19.8 percent reduction for male claimants — a difference of 0.3 per cent.

The reductions result from the more stringent eligibility requirements for people who have claimed UI benefits in the past year; new entrance requirements for entrants and re-entrants to the labour force; the establishment of a new minimum UI insurability provision; the benefit repayment for high income individuals; and the reduction of the benefit

rate from 66.66 per cent of the weekly income to 60 per cent.

There will be 11.5 percent fewer males able to establish a claim, compared to 13 percent fewer females, the Government estimates.

Employment strategy

The employment strategy is directed towards both men and women. In some programs, such as language training, women represent 55 per cent of the participants, compared to a 39 percent representation in the labour force. Women make up 44 per cent of the participants in the Canada Summer Youth Employment Program.

Other courses, such as the Canada Manpower Industrial Training Program, have a female participation rate of 28 per cent. Apprenticeship training (a provincial responsibility) is a major concern; at present, the female participation rate is 2.8 per cent.

"Women earn lower wages than men, face greater job insecurity and are employed in jobs traditionally defined as women's work. However, we are actively working on changing these situations and I am sure that in the long-term we will be successful," Mr. Cullen stated.

New aluminum alloy discovered

Two researchers from Kingston, Ontario have discovered a new aluminum alloy that has the lightness, strength and corrosive resistance to make it useful in everything from lighting fixtures to parts for small cars, an official of Alcan Canada Products Ltd. said recently.

The alloy is called "superplastic" because, when heated, it can be formed like plastic into complex shapes. Yet it has about the same strength as steel in an auto body frame, Michael Wheeler, program manager said.

The alloy was discovered three years ago by David Moore and Larry Morris, researchers for the Alcan Research Centre, when they added zinc to an aluminum-calcium alloy.

The product, which was developed in secret, has captured the interest of three or four companies in the U.S.

Alcan is considering expanding its production of the alloy beyond Kingston to its plant in Oswego, New York and to Europe.