

Social justice naturally includes other important issues such as women's treatment under the law, their legal needs, accessible, affordable child care, and women's health.

(C) PARTICIPATION AND ACCESS

Women's direct participation in the political decision-making process has been slow to develop. It was not until 1929 that women were granted the right to hold all forms of public office; a right attained 11 years after the granting of federal female suffrage. At present, women occupy approximately 9% of the seats in the House of Commons. Between 1919, when they were first given the right to sit in the Commons, and 1984 the percentage of female incumbents never rose above 5%.⁽⁹⁾

In a "study of the five federal election campaigns between 1950 and 1975, only 18 percent of women sampled for the study were nominated in ridings in which their party had won three of the five previous campaigns."⁽¹⁰⁾

For women to have an influence on public policy, they must be involved in the policy-making process including elective office, appointments to Crown corporations, regulatory agencies, and the Senate.

Providing fair access for women to all facets of Canadian society is a central concern of this government and of women's groups. Recognizing this need, the present government set a target of doubling its discretionary appointments of women from 15% to 30%. To date, the government has increased such appointments to 27%.

Along with access to decision-making, other areas of concern include employment equity, education and training, health and social services and discriminatory attitudes.

The problem of access is multi-dimensional. Having access to better employment prospects requires skills training programs geared specifically to women who have either been out of the labour force for an extended period or who have never had paid employment. Eliminating stereotypical views of women's abilities and positions in society and establishing training and re-training programs will facilitate entry into "non-traditional" employment areas.

Gaining access to suitable employment is especially difficult for visible minority immigrant women. Often these women don't have the necessary language skills to enter the job market at even the lowest level; or once in entry-level jobs they become locked into underemployment. Well-educated immigrant women often face barriers because of a "lack of standardized evaluation procedures of non-Canadian academic degrees." As well, "the requirement of Canadian experience prohibits them from entering...the general labour market" and leaves them with few choices. Even well-qualified immigrant women can easily find themselves unemployed or underemployed. (Quebec Committee in Support of Visible Minority Women, Ottawa, March 26, 1987) Women of colour, whether Canadian born or immigrant, suffer from many barriers including systemic discrimination, racism and poverty.