

*Supply*

number, 39 per cent of incidents involved a person in authority. Surely no one would think for one moment that the job performance of a woman who is the victim of sexual harassment will be the same as that of a male colleague, that she will be evaluated objectively, that her opinion will be taken into account? Sexual harassment is a loathsome expression of the inequality that often plagues women. All the measures aimed at eliminating sexual harassment foster employment equity.

• (1520)

I could also talk about the importance of working conditions that are compatible with parental or support roles, such as parental and maternity leave and flexible hours. Unfortunately, I do not have enough time. I can, however, tell you that such working conditions are an essential part of employment equity. The measures designed to help individuals juggle family and job responsibilities facilitate access to the labour market and especially job retention. Such equity measures ultimately promote women's economic equality.

I cannot conclude without commenting on the insidious merit principle. The motion tabled by the Reform Party calls for rejecting Bill C-64 because hiring and promotion should be based solely on merit rather than on gender and race. If the hon. member for Fraser Valley East is so determined to put merit before gender and race, how does he explain the fact that women still earn only 73 cents for every dollar earned by men? I would like him to explain this to me.

Of course, in an ideal world, hiring and promotion would be fair, and there would be no discrimination on the basis of race, gender or physical disability. Yet, statistics show that we do not live in an ideal world. Non-disabled white men still hold 78 per cent of management positions in the public service. The powers and the economic levers are in their hands.

Let us look at the merit principle. As Kate Erickson of the National Association of Women and the Law claims, merit is assessed in a traditional way based on value judgments. The merit principle is part of discrimination history. In other words, during a job interview, a white man with the same lifestyle, clothing and education as the CEO will seem better qualified. On the other hand, a member of a visible minority will not benefit from the same stereotype and will seem unqualified. Yet, if these people were judged solely on their qualifications and experience, without a family name revealing ethnic origin, for example, it might be possible to look at their real qualifications independently of their social status.

The notion of merit is rather arbitrary. Systemic barriers have always prevented some individuals from landing jobs. The employment equity legislation does not suggest that individuals without qualifications be hired. It does not suggest that we

should hire people on the basis of their race, gender or physical condition. It suggests that systemic barriers be removed so that individuals who meet the job requirements can be hired in spite of their differences.

In an ideal world free of racism and discrimination, we would not need this kind of legislation. However, in a world where employers do not want to hire a certain individual because it would mean having to widen doorways in order to allow wheelchair access, where 25 per cent of women are sexually harassed in the workplace, where women with disabilities and immigrant women are poorer than their male counterparts, we need such legislation. The fact is that, at present, the workplace does not operate on merit and is not fair and equal. Without legislation, there can be no fairness.

Only a very small part of the motion is acceptable in its wording. "Equality for all Canadians" are fine words describing an ideal situation. Unfortunately, we are still a million miles from there, especially as far as women, aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities and members of visible minorities are concerned. And it is for these people that we pass legislation on employment equity, so that, someday, they can have equal access to jobs available to men and finally break out of the poverty in which they are kept by the present system.

• (1525)

[*English*]

**Mrs. Sharon Hayes (Port Moody—Coquitlam, Ref.): Mr. Speaker,** as a member of the committee reviewing employment equity legislation, I am aware that 90 per cent of the witnesses who came before the committee supported the legislation. I am also aware that is likely more by the choice and selection of those witnesses than by the actual representation of the Canadian population to support that.

I have just done a random telephone poll in my constituency. My constituency is on the outskirts of Vancouver. It is one of the more multicultural communities in our area, with a high percentage of immigration, at least 50 per cent women, I am sure, and so on.

The results of that random polling were opposite to what the committee experienced. There was a 90 per cent rejection of any kind of hiring other than on the basis of merit alone. I was interested in some of the member's comments regarding merit. The Canadian people think highly of that as a criterion for hiring.

She commented on women in the workplace; 73 per cent of the average wage and 78 per cent of men being in management within the public service. Is my colleague aware that some of that may be due to choice or the time factor involved in entry into the workforce? Is she aware there are far more women being allowed to enter grad school now than there are men? The