

Supply

boundary arrangement which really does not reflect reality, or disentitled because they were given information by the offices of the UIC and Manpower which, when relayed to Statistics Canada, turned out to their disadvantage.

● (2335)

Finally, I want to turn to a matter which was raised by my colleague, the hon. member for New Westminster-Coquitlam, earlier this afternoon or this evening. The minister will recall that the hon. member was discussing affirmative action, which I think is of concern to a great number of people all across the country. I think we have come to the conclusion in a general way that if women are to achieve their rightful reward in the workplace they will achieve it only if there is an affirmative action program which is mandated.

It is becoming increasingly clear to most of us that although it might well be desirable, voluntary affirmative action is somewhat impractical. Compare our level of success with that of the United States. The minister surely knows that in the United States the laws have teeth and citizens can sue unfair employers under the affirmative action law. In addition to that, all large companies with federal contracts are monitored by government officials. They look to make sure that there is parity in the work force and parity in the workplace and that women are given a reasonable opportunity on the basis of their numbers, something they not only deserve but to which they are entitled. What they have asked, quite simply, is that if 45 per cent or 47 per cent of a town's workers are female, why is it that a local company might have only 20 per cent or less of its total staff composed of female workers with perhaps none of them in management? That is not uncommon. I am sure the minister knows that in the past few years the city of Chicago, the U.S. department of energy and even *The New York Times* have been successfully sued. They have had to pay many millions of dollars for not having lived up to the affirmative action program and the letter of the law.

That money has been paid to women who have suffered from job discrimination. I do not suggest for a moment that there are not people who comply willingly with what is accepted by most of us as a fair and rightful position, but I do suggest that far too many do not. I heard it said today that the federal government does some \$11 billion worth of business through contracts purchased from private companies in the private sector, and I think it would be useful if the government were to implement as a matter of law that the rights of women are not to be discriminated against, and put into practice an affirmative action program with respect to those companies and, in all fairness, an affirmative action program within the various ministries. I mean one which works. Otherwise, I do not think we should enter into contracts with those companies. It would not take long. Within a short period of time they would be happy to comply and would in fact comply.

I have one final point to make. It is somewhat related although considerably different in many aspects. Some day we will have to look at new ways to get people who are handicapped into the workplace. I think we start from the wrong

premise. Somehow we look at a person who is handicapped and try to think of what job he or she could do. I think we will have to try to get people to start at the other end and assume that unless it is proved otherwise, handicapped persons can, in fact, undertake any job at any place of work, and insist that they be given an opportunity. I think it is only fair and I think we must undertake that if there is to be any kind of equality in this country worth speaking about.

● (2340)

With those few remarks, I invite the minister to comment on what I asked; if there is a moment left, I may wrap up, but I doubt there will be a moment left.

Mr. Axworthy: Mr. Chairman, I understand that three minutes are left, so if I take two to answer, the hon. member will have one to sum up.

He asked me a number of very detailed and important questions. I will again treat them briefly, and if he is not satisfied, I will attempt to obtain the answers for him in a written form.

With regard to the question of real estate agents, let me tell him that under the Unemployment Insurance Act you are eligible for benefits only when you show that you can no longer perform the job to which you have been assigned. The only proof we have of a real estate agent being eligible is to take away his licence. Otherwise he or she could still go out and sell real estate, which means he or she would still be in the market. I think the hon. member would agree that we would not want that kind of double functioning, of being able to sell at the same time as being able to receive benefits. That is the reason there must be some proof of the fact that you are now eligible for benefits, that you can no longer work in your chosen profession.

On the mobility proposal in the construction industry, let me say that just two nights ago I met together with my colleague, the Minister of Labour, with the executive board of the construction trades. They made many of the same proposals. The one which attracted my interest most directly concerned mobility grants for workers. I told them at the time, and I repeated it in the committee, that this is a matter I intend to take up with the Minister of Finance. I think it is a very important recommendation and I see no reason why we could not introduce it at an appropriate time when we find the money necessary. It makes good sense and I know I have the support of many of my colleagues.

On the question of the minimum insurability, I would remind the hon. member, just to clarify the record, that he said it would be 20 hours. As of January 1 of the coming year, 15 hours per work week of employment will be required. We are examining the issue of whether there should be one or more employers and we realize there is an inconsistency. I have referred this matter to the unemployment insurance review. As I have said before, they will be putting forward their discussion paper some time in the new year, and one of the items which will be examined is how we can have a degree