

Supply

● (1630)

[Translation]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate. The Hon. Member for Louis-Hébert (Mrs. Duplessis).

Mrs. Suzanne Duplessis (Louis-Hébert): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to take part in the debate on the motion presented by the Hon. Member for Vancouver East (Ms. Mitchell), because the status of women is one of my major concerns, and also because I would like to tell Hon. Members a little more about what the Government has done to promote women's employment. I find it hard to understand why the Hon. Member for Vancouver East is presenting a motion of this kind. Since the Government was sworn in three years ago, it has seen the status of women in Canadian society as one of its major concerns. The Hon. Member wants tangible and compassionate policies for women. Mr. Speaker, the Government is doing everything it can to promote appropriate and effective measures.

The Hon. Member for Vancouver East also referred to equal participation in decision-making and in political life. These terms are so vague they can mean just about anything, but if it is a matter, as I believe it is, of offering women new opportunities, the best way is to have a paying job, and with the material benefits, the independence and self respect such a job provides.

Mr. Speaker, no previous administration has a record that can compare with what this Government has done to promote women's employment. Employment barriers as a result of systematic discrimination and prejudice have been revealed for what they are and torn down. Never before have Canadian women been present in such large numbers and on the same equal basis, in workshops, board rooms and the corridors of power.

Women would be the first to admit this is true.

Mr. Speaker, since we came to power in 1984, 337,000 women entered the labour market. During the same period, the unemployment rate dropped by 2.3 per cent. In fact, the number of jobs filled by women increased by 427,000, and 80 per cent are full-time jobs.

Let the Hon. Member for Vancouver East (Ms. Mitchell) try to denigrate the Government with her motion. Some 427,000 Canadian women who have paying jobs have proved they have confidence in the economy. Their improved employment situation is of course due to economic growth. And I think the Hon. Member will have to acknowledge that it was this Government's policies that contributed to that growth. By creating a climate conducive to investment, the Government made it possible for the private sector to create real, permanent jobs. Thanks to our efforts to reduce the deficit, we have restored the confidence of investors in our economy and lightened the tax burden on future generations.

Mr. Speaker, the workplace is undergoing a spectacular transformation, the increasingly important role of women is a striking example. Today, economic growth is highest in the

small business sector, and women are responsible for a considerable share of that growth. Today, one third of Canada's small businesses are owned by women, and this share is increasing rapidly. At this rate, women may own 50 per cent in three years.

Now this is an outstanding change in relation with conditions which existed only a few years ago. Fifteen years ago, only 6 per cent of university graduates in business administration were women. In 1982, that proportion had risen to almost 34 per cent. During the same period, the percentage of women graduates from law schools in Canada had more than quadrupled from 9 per cent to 38 per cent. Women are beginning to carve out a place for themselves in the business world, in the courts, in medicine and in Parliament.

However, those statistics show more than the determination of women to play a full role in the social and economic life of the country. They also indicate the important part played by women in our economic welfare. Indeed, a number of them meet an economic need of our society. However, many other statistics give us a quite different view especially those indicating the problems of single parents who are women. A recent report of the National Council on Welfare shows that families headed by single women are usually five times poorer than families with two parents.

One of the main obstacles facing women on the labour market is due to the fact that they are concentrated in a few sectors and occupations which could be called occupational ghettos, that is in service industries or as salespersons or administrative support staff. As a result of conditions on the labour market today, most entry-level jobs in those areas will be increasingly sought.

This being so, to maintain and improve its position in our competitive world nowadays, Canada has to count on its most valuable assets, that is on our whole human resources.

Over the past two years, the Government has taken two major initiatives to help working women. If I may, Mr. Speaker, I would like to provide the House with a few details. First of all, there is the Employment Equity Act which was promulgated in June of last year. It applies to all employers under federal jurisdiction which have 100 employees or more, whether they are Crown corporations or private companies in the area of banking, transportation, and so on.

Under this legislation, all obstacles limiting or preventing the employment of women, Indians, members of visible minorities and the handicapped should be canceled and eliminated. Likewise, the employers are responsible for taking special steps to ensure that people belonging to these groups fully participate in the labour market.

The legislation does not impose any quota or stringent restriction or time schedule on employers to meet.

Our Government's objective is development and not dependency. It is making funds available to benefit Canadians and not bureaucracy.