

Industrial Status of Women

repeat them—"that its application protected established wage rates against undercutting".

The bill before us, Mr. Speaker, covers only workers under federal jurisdiction. It proposes an accepted principle which is found in the laws of many lands and in numerous states of the United States of America, as well as three provinces of Canada. Without further remarks, Mr. Speaker, I recommend the measure to the consideration of the house.

Hon. Milton F. Gregg (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, I have again listened to my hon. friend with interest. I congratulate her on her presentation today which has been very brief, and I shall endeavour to follow her example as far as I can.

Last year she described the proposed law as "a progressive type of legislation that fits well into the changed employment conditions of our time". With this, as with many other things she said last year and has said today, I agree, for the increasing number of women in our labour force in Canada has brought the issue of women's wages to public attention in a very emphatic way, as never before in this country.

But the question is not one alone of equal pay for equal work. To my mind it involves the larger problem of women's wages in general. These are at a considerably lower level, certainly relatively, than the wages paid to men. I think any survey indicates that. This basic inequality is due to many factors, not the least of which is the customary practice of establishing the rates for jobs, in the traditional occupations of women, at lower levels than those authorized for the jobs for which men are hired. It is a situation about which we need to have more exact information, one for which equal pay legislation does not provide a remedy.

The whole question of women's earnings in Canada, including the various factors involved in their determination, is one of the subjects that our new women's bureau has set itself to study. I know my hon. friend looks upon me with a sceptical eye when I talk about civil servants and departmental committees studying various things, but in this case I think she will agree there has been some evidence that a serious study has at least been started.

I should like to emphasize the importance of the establishment of our women's bureau. In the past my department has given a good deal of consideration to the special problems of women in employment. We are now equipped, I think, to do quite a bit more in this regard. We expect that the studies and research of the new bureau, and the availability of the results of that work to

[Mrs. Fairclough.]

all women in Canada, will make possible the spreading of information in regard to women's work, and equally important, if not more so, an analysis of the urgent problems that are involved. These activities, we believe, will be an important means of strengthening their economic status, and of obtaining proper recognition of the contribution they make to our labour force.

With respect to the hon. member's bill, from one point of view the question at issue is not the principle of equal pay for equal work. Acceptance of that principle as a standard for the community is, I believe, essential to social recognition of the value of women's work and the important part they play. My question is, without greater clarity as to the extent of the problem would legislation at the federal level contribute to the solution of the larger problem of women's economic position throughout the nation? It is my conviction that legislation designed to implement a broad principle is most effective when it is applied to a problem the elements of which are clearly defined. I am going to contend that this problem has not all those factors clearly defined. I hope we can get them so without too much delay.

My hon. friend will recall I said last year that while I was in agreement with the underlying principle of the proposal, until we had investigated further I was not prepared to support the legislation. Since that time the Department of Labour has made a study of the comparative wages of men and women in the same or similar job classifications in enterprises which come under federal jurisdiction. As members of the house are aware, in our civil service the salaries within any particular classification are exactly the same, whether for men or women. With respect to those working for the federal government at prevailing rates, it is the practice of my department to recommend that the rate for a classification be the same regardless of whether the work is performed by a man or a woman under the same job title. Taking these things together, I think I can say that this government and my department certainly do stand for the principle here enunciated.

Collective agreements and wage schedules in industries under federal jurisdiction in most cases establish the rate for the job. There do remain, however, a few schedules in which a differential occurs, but it does not necessarily follow that in such instances the principle of equal pay for equal work is always disregarded. To know exactly what the situation is would require further analysis and, in some cases, even field inquiries which are within our facilities to conduct. This work is going on now. At the present