

Adjournment Debate

establish an EOW directorate as such. What the directive stated was that department heads were to take steps to encourage more women to move into middle and upper echelon positions within the federal government, and the methods were left to the discretion of the departments. Departments with full time EOW co-ordinators now number 16—40 per cent—but there are other departments that have EOW co-ordinators who spend the greater amount of their time on EOW related duties while also having other duties, such as the Department of the Environment, for instance.

● (2307)

The employment and immigration department has a co-ordinator who spends 80 per cent of her time on those duties. There is a similar situation in the Department of Public Works and the Public Archives. There are two other departments which do not have a designated person, but more than half of the departmental co-ordinators have relatively senior staff who supplement the EOW activities.

The Public Service Commission has decided to assign five permanent staff positions to its regional operations, and these five will supplement the existing Public Service Commission resources, be more closely in touch with regional considerations and give each of the six regions in Canada a full-time co-ordinator. In terms of the most recent public service promotions of women into the senior levels, the progress continues to be slow, but the scientific and professional groups which the hon. member has singled out are the worst of the lot.

There is a change in the proportion of women in the administrative support category. This has dropped from 67.1 per cent in 1974 to 63 per cent in 1976, which does demonstrate a slow but steady reduction in the proportion of women in the more traditional female occupations. At the other end, while the total appointments to the public service have also been dropping steadily since 1974, women's share of these appointments has remained virtually constant. There is an interesting and positive shift, particularly in the foreign service category. Some women are now reaching intermediate and more senior levels, although women are still not fully participating at the higher levels.

I notice that Mr. Speaker is at the edge of his chair, so the other figures will have to rest.

TRADE—DISCREPANCIES IN RETAIL PRICE OF GASOLINE—
REQUEST FOR INVESTIGATION

Mr. W. C. Scott (Victoria-Haliburton): Mr. Speaker, my remarks tonight result from what I considered to be an unsatisfactory answer to a question that I asked of the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Horner) in this House on February 14 of this year. It does not, however, mark the beginning of my interest in this matter. A quick check of my records indicates that I have been asking questions of various ministers concerning gas and oil pricing policies since about the middle of 1973.

[Miss Nicholson.]

On February 14 I asked the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce if his department would look into the possibility of collusion between the major oil companies to squeeze out independent gasoline dealers and establish monopolies throughout the country in retail sales outlets. The minister replied that my representation would be noted. Surely, Mr. Speaker, something more than that is needed now that we have firm evidence that all is not well in the area of gasoline retail sales in most parts of the country. Surely a minister who has any real interest in his area of responsibility would make some kind of an investigation into charges that are as serious as those that I have made.

● (2312)

My concerns lie in three distinct areas, all of which are related and are designed to work a hardship on the Canadian motorist. Although the minister replied that gas marketing falls within provincial jurisdiction, it will be seen that there is an element of federal responsibility and federal jurisdiction involved in my charges.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, there is clear evidence, supported by sworn statements by oil company executives to the Isbister royal commission hearings, that some if not all major oil companies transfer refined products to their own outlets at prices lower than their net prices to independent dealers. It was shown that the purpose behind this practice is to allow their outlets to undersell the independents and force them out of business. Wherever independents are forced out of a neighbourhood, the price of gasoline is pushed back up by the surviving gas stations, owned of course by major oil companies.

This practice is called loss-leadering, which in the business community is considered a legitimate business tool but which, when used as a continuing practice to discourage competition, can only be considered an unfair trade practice. It is, in fact, a violation of anti-combines laws.

My second concern is that this practice has already forced many independent gasoline dealers out of business, and more will follow if nothing is done to correct the situation. This results in loss of jobs in an industry where thousands of people are employed directly and many more indirectly. Independent dealers have enormous sums of money invested in equipment and facilities, and employ thousands of people all across the country. Yet, Mr. Speaker, the competitiveness in the field of independent oil and gas retailing holds down the cost of gasoline to motorists and transportation firms, tourist operators and others. It has already been established, for instance, that part of the reason for the decline in tourism in Ontario, and I would suspect in other provinces, is the cost of operating a motor vehicle in our country. This is not only the fault of the oil companies but the federal government. I will get to that in a moment as my third area of concern.

The oil companies complain that they must engage in price-cutting from time to time to compensate for excess refining capacity. This, of course, is the major cause of the frequent price wars that work an even greater hardship on independent dealers, and ultimately on gasoline customers.