

Supply

The federal portion of his taxes which goes to service our accumulated mountain of debt—now close to \$200 billion—is now about 30 cents on the dollar. By the year 2000, Mr. Speaker, if we do not go in new directions as the Government proposes, will it not be 40 cents, 50 cents or 60 cents of each dollar he earns which must go to service our debt? And how much less will be available for job creation, social programs, pensions and for a whole range of programs which all Canadians believe in so strongly?

If we follow the example of the Mitterrand Government of France after 1981—which was a “let'er rip” spending philosophy—as the motion would have us do, it seems to me we would have more unemployment, more taxes, more bankruptcies and more inflation. I remind you, Sir, that the French franc has already had three devaluations since 1981. We would have a general decline in which women, the disabled and the visible minorities would become the first victims. If we followed the route of France, would we then not also have more austerity with all kinds of layoffs in both the private and the public sectors?

What I am suggesting, Sir, is that if we follow the example of countries which have their economies in order, such as Switzerland, Japan and West Germany, it seems to me that women in Canada, along with the disabled and the visible minorities, would be in the best situation. If we can create a rising economic tide in Canada, all Canadians will benefit. In a sinking economy, some Canadians, such as the three groups I have already mentioned, will suffer far more. If I am correct, then women are obviously among the largest group which has the greatest interest in an improving economy.

This Government is acutely aware of the economic problems which are unique to Canadian women. We are determined to bring about economic renewal, and what is economic renewal if it is not of and for the people? We are committed to the direction set out in the Charter of Rights. People come first and will always come first with this Government. Equality in Canada among the sexes was a priority of this Government before April 17 and it will always be a priority of this Government. Expanding employment and creating new opportunities is at the heart of our program for national economic renewal. We are committed to providing lasting jobs for all Canadians who want to work, and again I repeat, including women, the disabled and the visible minorities.

In its economic statement, the Government committed an additional \$1 billion in 1985-1986 primarily to help Canadians acquire new skills and find jobs in the private and public sectors. I think it is proper to point out that since September last, 201,000 new jobs have been created, compared with what I am told were 72,000 new jobs created during the same period last year. In the month of April alone, employment in our country grew by 89,000 jobs, the best gain in almost five years. The number of unemployed has declined by more than 80,000 and the unemployment rate decreased by .3 per cent to 10.9 per cent in April, although I certainly agree that is far too high. It is my understanding that new jobs for women have accounted for well over half the increase in employment since

the end of the recession, but I do not mean to suggest for a moment that we dismiss any of the remarks made in this debate so far; we are fully aware that the largest group in the workforce to be discriminated against are women.

● (1240)

For example, we all know that over 50 per cent of Canadian women are in the workforce, yet they earn on average only 60 per cent of what men earn. Some two-thirds of the minimum wage earners in our country are women, and the estimates are that over one-half of all Canadian women can expect to be poor.

This is the bleak reality of working women in Canada today, and social policies have to be designed to improve these circumstances. I do not believe the Government has shirked its responsibilities in this matter to date. For example, last month the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Miss MacDonald) announced the preparation of a report by management and Public Service labour unions on implementing equal pay for work of equal value in the Public Service. The report should be ready within two months. The Minister has stated her firm intention to introduce legislation which will assure all women and minorities of equal access to employment and job training. It is crucial that more women occupy positions of responsibility if society is to benefit from creative leadership, not only on women's issues but all issues. We in the Progressive Conservative Party are confident that such leadership will emerge within the federal bureaucracy as a result of putting men and women on equal footing. It is far too late, but we intend to do something about that particular issue.

The situation for older, non-working Canadian women is an altogether different matter. Older women are shockingly vulnerable to economic hardship. If my memory is correct, two-thirds of Canadian women over 65 years of age have an income of less than \$5,000 per year. The Government announced last November that it will extend the spouses' allowance program to all widows and widowers between the ages of 60 and 64. Some 85,000 low-income Canadians, mostly women, will benefit from this proposal starting this fall. In the Throne Speech of last November the Government committed itself to entering discussions with the provinces aimed at a comprehensive overhaul of the Canada Pension Plan, including such matters as portability, vesting, survivors' benefits, and pension coverage of women. Since then, as you know, Canada Pension Plan benefits were increased 4.4 per cent as of the beginning of this year. In January, federal and provincial Ministers of Finance met in Montreal and discussed, among other matters, the need to reform the CPP. In short, we have not been idle but there remains much to be done.

We must bring increasing pressure to bear on the provinces so they will assume their responsibilities in the areas under their jurisdiction. For example, it is the provinces' responsibility to provide daycare services which are affordable for the majority of Canadian women working outside the home. The same applies to pension reform in the private sector, where 80 per cent of pension plans are under provincial control, includ-