

Private Members' Business

Finally, measures need to be adopted to ensure that paid leave is available to all pregnant or nursing workers. Further, parental and child care leave should be increased from the current 24 week maximum to 52 weeks.

I would just say, before wrapping up, that I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to urge that both this and other health and safety protections be extended to parliamentary employees. In June 1986, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act was passed by this House, in which Parts II and III incorporated Parts III and IV of the Canada Labour Code for the protection of parliamentary employees. But those provisions still have not been proclaimed, almost five years later.

I would urge the member who introduced this motion to assist those of us on this side of the House who have been pressing the government again and again to proclaim those sections so that these improvements, when they come into place, will impact upon employees of this place and on Parliament Hill, as they would impact upon other Canadians.

Finally, since tomorrow is International Women's Day, the New Democratic Party and myself would urge the government to move soon and perhaps they might even announce tomorrow a very clear intention to pursue the objectives of the motion introduced by the member for Abitibi.

I can think of no better time than today to begin to ensure fair and non-discriminatory treatment for pregnant women in the work force and to safeguard them and their children from the impacts of workplace induced accident and disease.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Luc Joncas (Matapédia—Matane): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to speak to the motion tabled by the hon. member for Abitibi. We seldom have an opportunity to take a position on an issue that is so directly related to child bearing, and we have that opportunity today.

The hon. member's motion is aimed at helping women reconcile the demands of the workplace with their family obligations. Many of us are very familiar with this problem. In fact, most of us have to deal with this problem every day.

Canada is a country of families, Mr. Speaker. It is also a country of workers. Statistics Canada reports that more than half of the women with young children also have jobs, and their numbers are steadily increasing. This trend is due to a number of factors. First, today's women are better educated. They have qualifications they want to put to good use. Thanks to changing attitudes to the type of employment considered suitable for women, they now have access to jobs that are more interesting and more satisfying than those generally offered to previous generations. It is not surprising, Mr. Speaker, that today's women should wish to pursue their careers after starting a family.

This is not simply due to the fact that women want to "have it all", as some magazine articles would have us believe. And not only highly educated women keep on working when they are pregnant and go back to their jobs a few months after the birth of their child. It is a pattern that is followed by women from all classes in our society. For many young mothers, it is not a matter of choice but of necessity.

We all know how much Canadian families have changed in the past 30 years. The typical family in the fifties, consisting of two children, the father and family breadwinner and the mother, at home full time, is no longer the norm today.

In fact, in the nineties, only one family out of six resembles this model. There are far more families where both parents have to work, either full time or part time, to make ends meet. Furthermore, many Canadian families are single-parent families, most of which are headed by women.

Most women with children cannot choose to go to work or stay home. They must work to support their families.

Over the years, the present government has passed legislation to help working mothers. Provisions concerning maternity leave have been amended to extend this leave, to provide for greater flexibility in selecting the period during which maternity leave may be taken and to reduce eligible periods.

A woman with six months of continuous employment may now take maternity leave for a maximum of 17 weeks, at the time she feels is appropriate. She may start her leave up to 11 weeks before the expected date of confinement. However, she may work up to the day her child is born, unless her employer can prove she is unable to perform an essential function of her position.