

An Address on the Occasion of the

**20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Report  
“Equality in Employment”  
by Madame Justice Rosalie Abella**

York University, Toronto  
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Maureen O’Neil  
President, International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

In her Royal Commission Report “Equality in Employment”, Madame Justice Abella wrote as much about the necessity of changed approaches to complex policy areas like labour standards, education and training, and child care — key to reducing inequalities in employment — as she did in calling for explicit strategies within the work place — Employment Equity as we came to know it.

Happily, there was legislation on Employment Equity and I know as a federal Crown Agency that we certainly take it seriously today.

*Her* conclusions on the extraordinarily difficult questions related to deeper labour market structures are less well known, which is why I thought we should remember them today: No one piece of legislation could ever be the remedy for the complex questions raised.

Attending to them would have required — still requires — serious political resolve and commitment to an agenda for change which crosses political and organizational boundaries. It is still an unfinished agenda. Twenty years on, the challenges are even greater. Work patterns and wage levels have changed.

Research by the Canadian Policy Research Networks reminds us that earned income disparities have widened. Almost two million Canadians work for less than \$10.00 an hour — that is about one in six employed people. Most of them have some post-secondary training. Most are women — in fact, 69% of those earning less than \$8.00 an hour in 2000 were women.

Much more work today is non-standard than when Judge Abella wrote her report — fewer people have full-time, reasonably secure jobs on the premises of a single employer. It is this type of work which was most amenable, is most amenable, to Employment Equity legislation. Now, work is much more likely to be part-time (Judge Abella recommended pro-rated benefits for part-time workers but so far only those in well-

protected jobs in big public organisations get that). There are more short-term contracts, temp jobs, and people working on their own account. While some of these non-standard jobs are highly remunerated, many aren't. This increasing vulnerability and insecurity is not yet a salient political issues, although if you listened to Rex Murphy on Sunday, the worries about pensions are closely related.

Twenty years ago, Judge Abella was right to turn first to the deep issues — education, training, child care — even before examining legislated approaches to employment equity. Today, ways must be found to reduce the risks of facing vulnerable workers even as productivity and competitiveness in the economy is increased. This is the circle which must be squared if there is to be equality in employment. Were there a Commission on Employment today, this would be the challenge. Judge Abella set the agenda twenty years ago. For this, we thank you.

As always, like housework, much always remains to be done.