

Employment Equity

Public Service of Canada and were doing a competent job for us.

Native people experience a level of unemployment about five times higher than that of the nonnative population. When they are employed, it is usually in the unskilled sectors of the labour market and they have disproportionately low incomes.

Yesterday I referred to the difficulties which landed immigrants have in adapting to the two official languages of the country. We must review our programs of language training and we must ask the provinces to co-operate. Judge Abella reported on this extensively. She said that we must do something to modernize the methods and to make those courses more acceptable so that new Canadians will have less difficulty advancing in the workforce. In my riding landed immigrants frequently fill the lowest paid jobs in the lowest skilled sectors. They are usually the most vulnerable because their jobs are the first to be abolished in tough times.

From a purely economic point, employment equity is needed to ensure that human resources are not wasted because of discriminatory practices. A healthy economy needs the contributions of all qualified people who are willing to work and are competent. That is the only judgment we should make—not whether they are native, handicapped, disabled, or women. If they are competent they should be allowed to compete and to obtain jobs. The exclusion of women, visible minorities, disabled people, and native people from job opportunities and benefits can only contribute to the high cost of social service programs.

In conclusion, we are disappointed with the Government's refusal to amend this Bill. We would like to have had included in the Bill a higher penalty, and have it relate to the action plan as well as the reporting clause. We would like to have seen the penalty at \$500,000. We would like to have had the designated groups which speak strongly for the disabled, the native people, and women's groups included in this Bill so they would be consulted when things need to be improved.

We would have liked to have had a better definition of "reasonable accommodation". The Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) promised the handicapped people that he would study this issue personally. He did not study it very long or hard and he did not do a darn thing about it. We would have liked a requirement that the action plans be sent to the Minister for review and be available to the Canadian Human Rights Commission, upon request, for examination.

We would have liked those things to have been included in the Bill but, unfortunately, they are not. The Bill will be accepted as it is, but it is a smoke and mirrors Bill. Everyone in the House accepts the principle of the Bill, but its lack of teeth frustrates us. We would like to have had a Bill with more power and equity. We would like to have had a stronger Bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member for Ottawa-Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) has made a good speech. He is a good Member of Parliament and a very progressive one. However, I

wonder why the Liberal Party did not do this during its 20 years in power. His party formed the Government in 1963 under Mr. Lester Pearson with 168 seats in the House. It then came to power once again under Mr. Pierre Trudeau. My question, therefore, is this: Why did the Liberal Party do nothing in 20 years to ensure employment equity in Canada?

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, I am happy that the Hon. Member has asked this question because it gives me a chance to point out that it is quite untrue to suggest, as do the Parliamentary Secretary and the Conservative Party, that we did nothing. It is completely untrue, and I would like to remind the House that, in 1971, Canada was the first country in the Western world to recognize the role of women at the highest level of Government by creating a Cabinet position for the advancement and promotion of women.

A non-governmental advisory council on the status of women was established in 1973. In 1972, the Federal Government endorsed the convention of the World Labour Organization on equal pay for work of equal value. The Liberal Government also introduced an omnibus Bill to ensure equal status for women in 1975. In 1976, we gave passage to the Canadian Human Rights Act, which forbids discrimination based on sex. In 1978, we amended the Canada Pension Plan to provide for the equal sharing of retirement credits, as well as the Canada Labour Code to eliminate pregnancy as a motive for lay-off or firing. Then, in 1982, we had in this very House a debate of nearly one year on the famous Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which was finally passed by Parliament after being introduced by the Liberal Government and in which Section 15 guarantees equality for all Canadians. Afterwards, we also created the Abella Commission because this issue had to be examined. The Abella Commission was therefore established in 1983 and it presented its report in 1984.

Unfortunately, the Canadian public decided to throw us out, and I am not blaming anyone. However, the Government in power certainly had lots of advice. Now I have been in the House for at least fourteen years now, and we have been discussing the subject for at least that long. That is my answer, and that is what I said three or four times in this House, and if I am asked the same question again, I will repeat my answer once more.

Since 1971, Mr. Speaker, a lot has happened here. We took care of native people, we took care of housing, we took care of the disabled, we took care of women. Projects and programs were set up. I am certainly not ashamed to say it. I am not saying that I am satisfied with what was done. I didn't say that. I didn't say I was satisfied. I merely said, Mr. Speaker, that I am one of those people who believe that by doing a lot more we will get a lot further in this area and get there faster.