

Routine Proceedings

Finally, the Financial Administration Act requires the Treasury Board to prepare annual employment equity plans. All departments and agencies are required to have employment equity plans ready by this coming April 1, 1994. Anyone interested may obtain copies of the plans from departments and agencies.

I also invite members of this House to make suggestions on how, since this is our first report, we might improve the annual report on employment equity.

[Translation]

Mr. René Laurin (Joliette): Mr. Speaker, first I want thank the hon. minister for tabling his report, although we have been waiting for it since June 30, 1992, in accordance with the Public Service Reform Act.

This document highlights, among other things, the representation profile of designated groups in the public service. It also provides the evolution of this profile from December 1988 to March 1993. It shows that, during those five years, female representation in the public service only increased by 3.2 per cent; aboriginal groups by 0.3 per cent; handicapped people by 0.4 per cent; and visible minorities by 0.9 per cent. In other words, the representation of designated groups barely changed over the last five years.

In its red book, the Liberal government stated its intention of doing something for these designated groups. Yet, the Employment Equity Act still does not apply to the public service, nor to federal commissions or agencies. What did the government do in the light of these findings and policy statements?

Today, the government announced pilot projects for the restructuring of special measures programs. It announced the creation of a special \$500,000 fund for handicapped people which, divided by ten provinces, barely represents \$50,000 for each province. There is certainly nothing extraordinary about this initiative.

The government also announced a development program for visible minorities which, for all intent and purposes, was already in place. Consequently, this is merely a measure ensuring the *status quo*. In the case of women, whose representation only increased by 3 per cent over the last five years, which means barely 0.6 per cent per year, the government announced development initiatives for administrative support positions.

• (1210)

There seems to be a significant gap between the government's avowed intentions, or at least its stated intentions, and the measures actually taken to correct the situation. Just to give you an idea of how inconsistent the government is, on the one hand it announces measures which will have a very limited effect while, on the other hand, it is going to court to challenge representations made by the Public Service Alliance of Canada in favour of

pay equity. Moreover, the government tabled Bill C-17, which freezes salaries in the public service, prevents a reform of salary scales, blocks a reform of job classification, and also delays wage parity and prevents it for the time being.

What will be the real impact of Bill C-17 on the reclassification of groups of employees? What concrete measures is the government taking to ensure that the salary freeze will not jeopardize negotiations on wage parity? There is a gap between the government's stated intentions, the low-impact measures it advocates, and the real problem of pay equity in the public service. That gap has not been closed and nothing leads us to believe that it will be closed in the coming weeks or years.

I will conclude by saying that the tabling of this report highlights the obvious contradictions between the government's real intentions and the weak measures it is taking to correct the situation. The government would be well advised to state its real intentions quickly, so that those affected can have some hope and confidence. After all, some have been waiting since the 1980s to improve their plight, and they have to have some hope that things will finally improve.

[English]

Mr. Ian McClelland (Edmonton Southwest): Mr. Speaker, this employment equity in the public service targets four designated groups: women, aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities and visible minorities. It covers people in the federal public service and other sectors under the public influence such as banks of federal charter and certain businesses that do business with the government.

In so far as the employment equity in the public service has as its primary goals, one, the removal of barriers to employment and, second, to encourage and support those in the designated groups to apply for advancement, then we endorse these activities and we applaud the public service for taking a leadership role.

However, we would caution that it is one thing to remove barriers to provide encouragement and quite another to promote or hire because of ethnic or gender considerations. I would caution the public service not to practise reverse discrimination.

As to persons with disabilities, the Standing Committee on Human Rights and the Status of Disabled Persons tabled a report last year. That report clearly indicates that a primary barrier to employment of persons with disabilities is a catch-22 situation. That is when persons with disabilities get a job and gain income from employment they do so very often at the expense of the very benefits they have been receiving that allowed them to get the job in the first place.

This is an area that we already know the answer to which is one of taxation. The standing committee brought the report forward and it should be reviewed by the employment equity people.