

Government Orders

Will those two-thirds be the unemployed? Will those two-thirds be the ones on welfare? Will those two-thirds be the ones who are not moving anywhere, not promoted, not given any employment, not given any opportunities?

Those are the real questions to be answered. People are our most important natural resource. Strategies that capitalize on the underutilized capabilities of every employable Canadian are clearly in the best interest of the country.

Employment equity improves the workplace environment and promotes productivity by encouraging a more tolerant and integrated workforce. This is the intent of Bill C-64. That is why I ask members opposite what is so reprehensible. What is so wrong with having the four designated groups standing shoulder to shoulder and sharing the workplace with the rest of the population? That is the way it should be. That is what our country is about.

We are a mosaic. We are not a melting pot. Canada is that kind of a country. We do not try as in the United States to make everybody the same. We are all individuals in the House which does not stop us from respecting one another. We do not have to agree ideologically with each other to respect one another as people. That is not the way the country should be proceeding into the future. That is not the way a country as diverse as Canada will work.

Individuals benefit from contributing to their communities. Canada profits from the skills and strengths they have to offer. In short we all benefit not just in better social conditions which are critical but in realizing our national economic potential. It is good business for Canada to have those people integrated into the workforce. It is good business for Canada and for us as elected officials to have those people independent, integrated, promoted, and to have them utilize their skills and their merits as they should.

• (1240)

We can recreate our country in a way that better reflects us by working shoulder to shoulder with designated groups and by acknowledging the contributions of members of the designated groups to the economic wealth and rich cultural diversity of our country. Every one of us has a contribution to make but we can only make it if we are given the opportunity.

Thank God for the opportunities given to those people. I have seen them work. I have seen programs clearly targeted to those groups and they work. They have given disabled people an opportunity, such as some of the programs where disabled people are integrated into banks and into some other areas. Be they clerical or whatever, they are a start. We know that and are working on another part of it such as promoting those people if they have the capability and the merit to do it. Why not? That is the way it should be.

Employment is the great equalizer. Jobs give us satisfaction, self-esteem and mutual respect. They also give us wages which allow us to provide a better standard of living for our families. Work gives us reason to believe in ourselves and for others to believe in us. This is the equality women, persons with disabilities, aboriginal peoples and members of visible minorities are seeking. We can take an important step toward that goal by adopting Bill C-64 and by doing so help our goal of building a more vibrant economy and a stronger country through a more representative workforce. We can make a positive contribution to Canada by helping disadvantaged Canadians build better lives for themselves and their families.

I appeal to my colleagues on the other side to take another look and to have a more tolerant view of what equality and equity are all about. It is not about rising above the rest, being better than anyone else and pushing people out of the way. The numbers are not there to substantiate that. They are stagnant; there is no movement there. Those people are not a threat. They need our help. We can do enormous good for those people. We can make a contribution to the country by helping them lift themselves up.

I appeal to my colleagues and I appeal to all other Canadians to take a tolerant view toward the bill and those people.

Miss Deborah Grey (Beaver River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the remarks of my colleague. I should like to ask her a question or two.

The minister related the incident about the sawmill accident. I certainly give my regards to that family. I could imagine what a disaster it would be in terms of the family income as well as the personal and tragic loss. I appreciate that the fellow who had his arm amputated was obviously unable to work in the sawmill industry after. The minister said it was a human rights issue. I suspect more specifically it might be a disability issue. Of course he faced that and was unable to work in the same area and provide for his family.

I can be called naive or whatever, but I cannot make the leap somehow logically that employment equity would solve that problem. Could the member enlighten me? I hate to plead ignorance here but it seems incredible to me. If all of a sudden employment equity or Bill C-64 had been an issue, how would it have made life different for him?

Would it not be wiser for that company to say that he had skills in the sawmill business? Maybe he could have been used in a different capacity which perhaps was not so physical that he needed to use his arms. If he had merit, capabilities and competence in the industry, surely they would have been able to work him into that. How in the world would employment equity all of a sudden solve those problems? I cannot see it.