

*Government Orders*

• (1550)

**Mr. John Harvard (Winnipeg St. James, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am glad to rise during debate to discuss Motion No. 7.

The hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve and his colleagues have made some eloquent points on behalf of this amendment, both here and previously in committee. That is the reason the government has already amended the original bill. That amendment made sense. To accept this amendment does not.

I want to take a few minutes to underline some of the essential elements in the government's approach to government equity to show why I will not be able to vote for this motion.

Two years ago at this very moment, almost every one of us was engaged in one of the most important federal election campaigns of our time. I was proud to campaign under the banner of a party and a leader with a clear plan. Our red book was a blueprint for action. It was no wish list. It was based on years of listening to Canadians and an active policy development process. It was a comprehensive approach grounded in a realistic perspective on what government can do.

As we well know by now, one of the commitments we made was to strengthen the Employment Equity Act. The old government had the information. It knew what needed to happen but it chose not to act. We said that it was time to move on this issue and we have with Bill C-64.

The red book was more than just a series of individual commitments. It was based on a sense of how Canada works best. Part of that was our understanding that business and government are not adversaries. We need each other. Canada needs a strong business community. We need an attractive business climate. A government that operates in an intelligent and strategic way fosters that kind of community in that kind of climate.

In essence we let business people do their work without reasonable interference from government and we look for ways to build productive partnerships. That has been our approach to employment equity. We know that voluntary efforts at equity simply have not worked, therefore legislation is needed but not heavy handed approaches.

Many of my colleagues have spoken of the willingness of the federally regulated business community to work with us on equity. I need not repeat the points they have made. One basic reason they are doing so is that we have adopted a human resource planning model for this legislation. We have designed this process to maximize co-operation. We also designed the process to maximize co-operation in the workplace.

Unions most certainly do have a place in this process. Unions do care. The labour organizations that made presentations to the committee stressed their commitment to social justice. We understand their contribution to workplace attitudes toward equity programs. We appreciate their concerns about making

employment equity work well, given issues such as seniority rights.

For all those reasons, government members on the committee decided to amend the bill, to underline the requirement for consultation with bargaining agents. The government understood the need to ensure that consultation was real and the bill, as it has come to us from committee, requires collaborations.

This is an important step. To go further is to make a mistake. To require employers to share authority with unions in some kind of co-management regime is to blur accountability. At the end of the day employers in law and in fact are responsible to the government for their achievements in employment equity. Unions are not.

The plan we offered to Canadians in 1993 did not envision the federal government shaking up the framework of federal labour relations. We believe that businesses understand the approach we have laid out for employment equity. We also believe they understand that getting unions on side makes sense in a human resources planning model. We believe that they will pursue collaboration in the spirit that is set out in this bill as it is before us now.

However, the government sees no need to force a process on employers that may simply not work for any number of local reasons. We hope they will take on partnerships for employment equity but we will let them decide based on their own situations. I have a great deal of faith that the businesses and federal government employers covered by this legislation will see as we do. They will capitalize on this opportunity to break down the barriers that may deny them the best from their workers or those who could be. I think they will do the right thing and they will do it in the way that works best.

• (1555)

The bill has already moved to underline the need for collaboration. It retains the emphasis on employer accountability. That is the right balance. It is the approach I will continue to support.

[Translation]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Is the House ready for the question?

**Some hon. members:** Question.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The question is on Motion No. 7. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Deputy Speaker:** All those in favour will please say yea.