

Employment Equity

The Minister of Employment and Immigration (Miss MacDonald) has rejected the amendments that both opposition Parties put forward. If she really believes in an enforceable Employment Equity Bill that is understood by Canadians and the target groups, why did she not agree to an amendment in Clause 7 which would stipulate that an employer who fails to comply with Clauses 4, 5 and 6 is guilty of an offence? She can use all the rhetoric in the world and make the best speeches to say how good this legislation is, but she is not convincing the employees in the target groups.

This legislation could have been a great achievement for the Government. Unfortunately, it is not. As the disabled people pointed out when they were here last week, this is a black day for Canada and employment equity.

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton—Melville): Mr. Speaker, we have now reached third reading stage of a Bill that deals with employment equity, a very important issue in this country. This whole discussion began about a year ago last March or February with the report of Judge Rosalie Abella. Legislation was tabled before the House, followed by second reading debate and lengthy legislative committee hearings at which many witnesses appeared. We have had report stage debate and we are now at third and final reading.

There is still a major difference between the Government on one side and the Opposition and four target groups on the other about the purpose of this Bill. I want to talk about those differences today, because I for one am disappointed that the Minister and the Government did not accept more amendments from the four target groups for whom this Bill was drafted, the women of Canada, Indian people, visible minorities and the disabled. All four of those groups appeared before our legislative committee to suggest many amendments because they believe this Bill is not strong enough and will not reflect what is needed to solve their problems.

The Minister and the Government have been very obtuse and have refused to accept major amendments, despite the fact that they were elected on a promise that they would listen to the Canadian people and reflect their wishes. However, this Bill does not do that.

The difference is that the government's Bill calls for voluntary employment equity with mandatory reporting while the four groups want mandatory employment equity in this country. The enforcement of that equity is not being provided with this legislation.

I believe it is worth while to remind the House of the election promise made by the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) in August, 1984, when many people thought there would be much tougher legislation. He said at that time:

Our Party will ensure that companies providing services to the federal Government hire increasing numbers of women to perform such services. When seeking government business, these companies will be required to detail their action plans, timetables, and programs for attracting, training and advancing women within their operations. . . . We support the need for human resources planning within the federal bureaucracy, which includes goals and objectives to achieve parity for women, at all levels of Government operations, commensurate

with their skills and expectations. Numerical goals are one of several goals required: training and retaining are others.

That is what the Prime Minister said during the election campaign in 1984.

I believe you were in the House last Monday, Mr. Speaker, when over 100 disabled Canadians gathered on the Hill to protest that the Prime Minister has not kept his word. Beryl Potter is one of the leaders of the disabled groups in Canada. She stated on the CBC national news last Monday night:

Like the Bill—it's not even worth the paper it's written on. . . . I've never been so disillusioned in my life as I am with Prime Minister Mulroney. I was a supporter of him. I worked for him in his campaign and I am totally, totally disillusioned.

Beryl Potter of the Coalition on Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities is a leader of the disabled in our country. She campaigned actively for the Prime Minister and the Conservative Party of Canada because she believed in the Prime Minister and that Party. She believed that that Party would do something useful for her as a disabled person and the people she represented. Yet, she said: "I am totally, totally disillusioned". She was so disillusioned that we all saw her in the gallery shouting things about the Government and the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Miss MacDonald) that I cannot repeat here because they are unparliamentary. When will they begin to listen to the people of this country?

One of the great tragedies of a Government with an overwhelming majority is that it becomes insensitive to public opinion. I recall talking to a veteran Conservative Member of Parliament about a week after the federal election in September, 1984. I will not repeat his name because he would not want it stated publicly, but I suggested that he must be happy with the result of the election, with 211 seats for his Party. He said: "Not really. We won 50 seats too many."

When we look at parliamentary tradition in this country and around the world where there have been large majorities, we see that those majority governments became insensitive to the will of the people and were often defeated after one term in office. We saw the problems with the Diefenbaker Government from 1958 to 1964 and what happened to the Trudeau Government from 1968 to 1972. Time and time again, governments with large majorities—

An Hon. Member: Like the present Government.

Mr. Nystrom: —have become insensitive. Like the present Government, as one of the Conservative Members is saying.

One only need ask Beryl Potter to see that the same problem is happening again. Beryl Potter and some disabled people came to this Parliament on March 26 and met the Prime Minister just before he walked into the Conservative caucus. She told the Prime Minister that the Bill should be strengthened in two or three areas, including the definition of reasonable accommodation to disabled people and a stronger penalty clause to make employment equity more enforceable and mandatory. The Prime Minister talked to Beryl Potter for five or six minutes and suggested that she accompany his Policy