

*Employment Equity*

that provide a very bleak picture indeed of the employment opportunities and benefits for designated groups. There is an imbalance in both statistical and monetary terms. Women have lower than average incomes. They are employed predominantly in sectors and in jobs which are the lowest paid. Women do not earn the same amount as their male counterparts for performing the same or similar jobs. Disabled people suffer from extraordinarily high unemployment rates. When they are employed they tend to be concentrated in the low-paying, marginal sectors of the labour market. They have additional expenses which those workers who are not disabled do not face, such as medication, special aids and devices, and special transportation services. Native people have incredibly high levels of unemployment, something in the order of five times higher than the non-native population. Recent immigrants to Canada face particular difficulties in advancing in the workforce. They are frequently found in job ghettos or in the lowest paid, lowest skilled and most vulnerable sectors of the employment market. So there is a problem which should have been addressed by the Government in its employment equity legislation.

I spent some three months touring the country with the Subcommittee on Equality Rights. We travelled from coast to coast to hold public hearings. We heard representations from Canadians representing women's organizations, native people, the disabled and visible minorities. They expressed their very serious concerns about the provisions of Bill C-62.

I wish to take this opportunity to remind the House and, through the House, Canadians, of some of the concerns which have been raised regarding the legislation we are debating today. One of the key spokespersons for the disabled, Beryl Potter, of the Coalition on Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities, said this:

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.

That from a former active Conservative and one of the heads of the Coalition on Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities. The spokesperson for the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada said: "Bill C-62 is of limited value". The spokesperson of the National Association of Women and the Law, Suzanne Boivin, said:

Nothing will change. Unfortunately, it is simply wishful thinking.

The groups which are affected by this legislation are unanimous in their condemnation of it. At the end of the day it is clear that the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Ms. MacDonald) and her Government have not effectively consulted with the groups affected by this legislation. In fact, they have ignored the major concerns raised by these groups and by their spokespeople.

I would like to take this opportunity to elaborate on why Bill C-62 is such a disappointment to the millions of Canadians who, in fact, were looking for concrete action, for decisive action, from the Government to ensure employment equity. First, I wish to recognize the excellent work done by Judge

Rosalie Abella in this area. We in the New Democratic Party have drawn upon her report in outlining what we believe to be the correct approach, the philosophical underpinnings of strong employment equity legislation. As well, I wish to underline the outstanding contribution made by my colleague, the Hon. Member for Yorkton—Melville (Mr. Nystrom), who in his work both in committee and in the House has reflected with eloquence the concerns of the groups which appeared before the committee seeking changes to the legislation.

When we examine Bill C-62 we see that the purpose of the Bill as spelled out is certainly commendable. The purpose of the Bill, as stated, is as follows:

The purpose of this Act is to achieve equality in the workplace so that no person shall be denied employment opportunities or benefits for reasons unrelated to ability and, in the fulfilment of that goal, to correct the conditions of disadvantage in employment experienced by women, aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities and persons who are, because of their race or colour, in a visible minority in Canada by giving effect to the principle that employment equity means more than treating persons in the same way but also requires special measures and the accommodation of differences.

That is the guiding principle of this legislation. However, when we go on to read the Bill itself, we find that it falls far short of that.

• (1510)

Once again, I would note that consultation with the groups affected by this legislation was sorely lacking. Beryl Potter, a former active supporter of the Conservative Party who now says that she has been betrayed by the Prime Minister of this country has said the following:

We have tried everything. We have consulted with the CEIC staff, appeared as witnesses before the Parliamentary Committee on the Bill, made pleas to the Prime Minister directly and rallied on Parliament Hill.

We have demanded that the Bill be amended to include the Government's own Departments and agencies and to include a penalty for failing to comply with employment equity plans. The Government has not responded to any of our demands.

All Hon. Members will recall that a week ago yesterday the members of the Coalition on Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities came to Parliament Hill and sat in the gallery. In many cases, these people were lifted into the gallery. They were bitterly disappointed with the response of the Government.

We have five underlying concerns with respect to the weaknesses in this legislation and I would like to deal with each of them in turn. The first and perhaps most fundamental concern is with respect to the lack of any effective enforcement mechanism or penalties large enough to act as a deterrent to the corporate sector. Shari Stein, the legal counsel for the Coalition on Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities, has said the following about Bill C-62:

How can anyone, the people, the provinces, the municipal Governments, take this legislation seriously when it has no teeth, it only requires voluntary compliance and the federal Government has exempted itself.

Furthermore, the Bill does not require that the so-called action plans with goals and timetables established by the firms be made available to the Human Rights Commission or the