

Government Orders

They will not seek however to create what the member's amendment seeks to create which is a sort of co-management regime that would by its very nature lead to strife between those on the management side with their responsibilities and those on the labour side with their responsibilities. It would totally confuse the two roles which both parties properly play in the workplace and would substitute, instead of this atmosphere of co-operation and collaboration, an atmosphere of mistrust between the two parties between which it is very important to establish good working relationships.

[Translation]

I wish to thank the hon. member for his contribution to this debate. Unfortunately, for the reasons I just mentioned, I cannot support Motion No. 7.

[English]

Ms. Roseanne Skoke (Central Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to address this honourable House today with respect to Motion No. 7 brought forward by the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve.

The government appreciates the hon. member's input into Bill C-64. However, we are concerned that his motion would have an effect that would not be beneficial to the administration of the Employment Equity Act. The way the motion reads, if it were to be adopted, it would in essence establish an employer-employee co-management arrangement under the act.

Members of the Bloc raised this issue in committee and the government was responsive and flexible in giving it due consideration. However, if we adopted the motion before us it might very well have negative ramifications in the way employment equity is administered. Responsibility must be clear in this regard.

• (1545)

Nevertheless I hasten to add that the intent of the legislation before us is not to create situations where management is imposing employment equity on workers without their input. This is not the intent at all. On the contrary, the current act encourages and requires productive consultations between employer and employee representatives. As I said previously, the government appreciates constructive suggestions. That is why we listened and accepted recommendations made in committee.

The effect of those recommendations is that Bill C-64 now requires collaboration between employer and employee representatives when preparing, implementing and revising employment equity plans.

However, the key aspect of this arrangement is collaboration, not co-management. The responsibility for making final decisions must remain with employers. After all, they are the ones who must answer to the commission regarding implementation

of the act. Hon. members will agree that the person who is held responsible for an action must retain the ability to make final decisions.

The government is trying to send a clear message here. For employment equity to be fair and effective, a co-operative effort in implementing its principles is required by both management and labour. The emphasis is very much the same, emphasis the government takes in its own relationships with other governments, the private sector, community organizations and so on. I am referring to the concept of partnership, a productive effort by all concerned to reach the same goal. That is exactly what came through in committee regarding the issue: collaboration, yes; co-management, no.

I remind the hon. member that adoption of his motion is not as simple as he may think. It would have widespread implications because the act does not have a provision which allows a tribunal to issue orders against a bargaining agent. In other words, collaboration requires just that, the two parties work together to reach a common goal voluntarily. Enforced collaboration is an oxymoron and experience shows that it makes for unproductive relationships.

Management must have final responsibility for its obligations under Bill C-64. It is management that must answer to the commission if it fails to meet its obligations under the act. It is unacceptable to adopt a situation wherein the employer is held responsible but does not have the ultimate authority to address that responsibility.

The government does not wish Bill C-64 to alter the framework of labour relations in a fundamental manner. That is not the purpose of the legislation before the House. Its purpose is to help move Canada toward true equality in the workplace. This is a step of which all Canadians should be very proud. Passage of Bill C-64 will enshrine in law the principle of equality for all Canadians. It will help to lay down a level playing field for those in the designated groups, specifically women, aboriginal people, persons with disabilities and members of visible minorities.

Bill C-64 also fulfils the government's pre-election commitment to strengthen the existing Employment Equity Act by extending coverage to virtually the entire public service. I believe hon. colleagues should also agree that fairness dictates that all Canadians have due access to employment opportunities. Therefore we must implement this legislation in a manner that will encourage co-operation and goodwill on the part of both employers and employees.

We thank the hon. member for his input. However, the government is satisfied with the bill's emphasis on collaboration. We are not prepared to move toward co-management. For that reason I cannot support the member's Motion No. 7.