

*Employment Equity*

**Mr. Speaker:** The Chair will reserve, consider all of these arguments, and come back to the House.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa-Vanier):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to speak to the amendment proposed by the Hon. Member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom), namely that Bill C-62, be amended in Clause 1 by striking out line 6 at page 1 and substituting the following therefor:

"2. The purpose of this Act is to promote and encourage".

employment equity, and we know what that means as far as the wording is concerned. The Hon. Member wants to amend this Bill because according to him, and we agree, the Bill does not go far enough, does not have enough teeth to provide any assurance or guarantee that employment equity will be achieved, and I quote the present wording of the Bill in Clause 2, which describes the purpose of the Act:

The purpose of this Act is to achieve equality in the work place so that no person shall be denied employment opportunities or . . .

. . . benefits.

Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the debate last Thursday, and I thought the comments made by Members supporting this amendment were rather important, and I would like to recall some of them, since we are starting a new week and in a debate like this it is good to put things into perspective.

The House will recall that the Government was not very receptive in committee to the amendments presented by the Opposition. At the report stage, parliamentary procedure allows certain amendments to be laid on the Table of the House for consideration.

To the Members on the Government benches I would like to say that a refusal to amend Bill C-62 and give it teeth and real power will look like they are not taking this Bill seriously. In fact we do not think Bill C-62 will help to achieve employment equity but, and this is something on which everyone will agree, that it will help further employment equity, but it inch by inch is a typically conservative approach, inch by inch and step by step. We say that a Bill as important as this one which affects the four target groups we want to help in their search for employment, and I may recall that these four target groups are women, the disabled, native people and what are referred to as visible minorities, these four target groups have asked and are continuing to ask the Government to amend the Bill and give it teeth so it will not be a paper tiger.

Unfortunately, until now, the Government has been saying: We refuse. So let us be honest and change the purpose of this Bill. Let's not say it will achieve employment equity but that it will gradually encourage employment equity, someday or other.

Mr. Speaker, that is why some of us are going to wait until the end of this debate to see whether this Government has the good will to amend this Bill and whether they can show they are taking this debate seriously and demonstrate their good

will by amending the Bill to give it teeth and give us something we can take seriously.

Last week I listened very carefully to the comments made by some of our colleagues. I remember one in particular, and I forget who made it, which referred to Judge Abella, who chaired the Royal Commission on Equality and Employment in 1984, at the request of the Liberal Government at the time. After it was tabled, her report became the subject of public debate. I remember that in her report, Judge Abella said, substantially, that rights that are not respected are no better than rights that are not granted. These may not be exactly the words she used, but it means that existing rights that are not respected are no better than rights that do not exist at all.

And I think this certainly applies to Bill C-62, which they would have us believe will truly encourage and in fact give us employment equity.

Mr. Speaker, in her report Judge Abella said four things: She wanted federally regulated employers to be obliged by law to adopt employment equity programs. If I have time later on, Mr. Speaker, I will tell you what happens to our employees in the federal Government. I think that there we have a very striking and very clear example of what can be done with the requisite good will.

Second, she said: Persuade the provinces to adopt similar legislation in areas under provincial jurisdiction. That is an important point.

Third, that respect for the contractual obligation be legally mandatory for all federally covered employers.

And fourth, the establishment of an organization whose mandate would be to enforce employment equity.

Those are the guidelines, Mr. Speaker, but what do we have here? What we have is Bill C-62 which attempts to make employment equity a reality, a principle which we all endorse. But we all agree that it is nothing more than an expression of goodwill, in our opinion a toothless measure which does not give us the necessary power and authority to make sure that employers will indeed abide by employment equity standards concerning groups which we know have long since been discriminated against, be they women, aboriginal peoples, visible minorities, or disabled Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, I want to focus on what the federal Government is doing these days, if only because Members opposite keep saying that nothing was done for 16 years under the Liberal administration, which is utterly false, and they know it. Perhaps they should read the remarks of the Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps), as reported on page 12113 of Hansard where she relates the events of 1971 and the achievements of the Liberal Government, particularly with respect to women's rights. As for me, all I want to do is talk about what the Public Service Commission of Canada has done about employment equity.

In 1971, Mr. Speaker, 15 years ago, the Public Service Commission set up a service to protect women's rights.