

Government Orders

For this member to tell me that businesses in Ontario are supporting this bill, this employment equity idea, over a fundamental principle of hiring people based on their individual merit is absolute nonsense. I would like to meet a businessman who responded to that survey who would tell me in all truthfulness that he does not care about the merit, the qualifications of the employees, but would rather base his hiring practices on this absurd legislation the Liberal Party is attempting to bring in here.

I ask these social engineers across the way to give us a break. That is not the real world any more.

Hon. Ethel Blondin-Andrew (Secretary of State (Training and Youth), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be associated with this important initiative, Bill C-64.

I believe the hon. member does not know what we mean when we talk about merit. I have worked with the under-represented target groups for many, many years. In 1984 to 1986 I worked with the Public Service Commission where we instituted a number of initiatives because there was such a gross under-representation of those target groups.

For instance, aboriginal people are the lowest paid on a national average. They are paid less than all of the average working population. If you are a disabled person you are grossly under-represented. It is very difficult for a disabled person who has merit to get a job on a meritorious basis.

• (1225)

These hon. members should be looking for ways to integrate the under-represented people rather than keeping them out and marginalized. Those aboriginal people who make it into the system are still mostly located in the technical and clerical areas. That is a fact and it has nothing to do with merit. Those people have merit. The problem is that they are not getting promoted. Even though they have merit, the qualifications, the experience and the skills, they are being paid less than other people. Talk about inequality. Those are the facts.

Let the hon. members know there is nothing wrong with sharing an equal place in the workplace, shoulder to shoulder with a woman, an aboriginal, a disabled person or a member of a visible minority. There is nothing wrong with that. No one said that if you are an aboriginal person, a woman, a disabled person or a member of a visible minority you have to be stupid or unqualified to make the employment equity program. That is not what this bill states.

This bill states that everyone will have an opportunity because of systemic discrimination and because the opportunities have not made themselves available over 125 years to those people to enter with equality into the workplace. This bill states that they will have the opportunity now. There are still fewer

people of those four target groups who are paid as much and who have as many promotions. I do not know why the hon. members cannot accept that fact.

The other day the hon. member for Wild Rose put a rather disparaging human face on employment equity by using his son. I have three children, but I am not going to come out here and plead a case for my children. I have worked to get them an education. They can fend for themselves and work for themselves. This is about broad public policy; it is not about one case.

If there ever was a case, listen to this. In my riding there is an aboriginal man who is now severely disabled. He is an elder in the community. In 1959, along with his four partners, he was working in a sawmill. He was in a serious accident while sawing wood for the government employees in a place called Rocher River. His friend was decapitated and this man's arm was amputated. He made a number of attempts to receive some type of compensation for his loss but had no success. This is an employment equity issue, an equality issue, a human rights issue.

Because this man lived in a harsh and inclement environment he had to rely on his skills. He went to residential school in that area but was not an educated man. He was a trapper. He had children. His children could not pursue or finish their education simply because he needed them to stay home and cut wood, haul water, and do all those things necessary to survive. I am not sure where the system failed. This man's wife has worked all of her life and has no regrets, but it was a severely difficult case.

These are the kinds of things we are talking about. We are talking about having a human mind and heart to the toils and the struggles of the average Canadian. We are not talking about creating gross inequality and promoting people so that they are falling off the top.

This is a very disparaging and discouraging kind of discussion we are having with members opposite. Why is it so difficult for them to understand the struggles of that kind of individual rather than bringing in people who are saying they did not get a job because they are not the right colour? That is not what it is about.

There are people who are disabled, women, visible minorities, aboriginals, and a combination thereof who have severe difficulties. On the national average, when these people make it into the system they do not get paid as much as the person who is already there. They are paid less for the same work.

• (1230)

There is another problem. When they get into the system they are at the bottom. Aboriginal people, for instance, are mostly in clerical and technical areas. They are not in senior management areas. That is changing but very slowly.