

*Government Orders*

minority, a woman, an aboriginal or a person with a disability. Those things work against them. They seem to cloud perception of their ability to do the job and to take on more senior responsibilities. It happens throughout every sector of the economy.

Let me come back to the Canadian reality. The Canadian reality is that our citizens want and deserve a country that breaks down these barriers to success. Two years ago that is what our country offered to Canadians and ever since we have been living up to our commitment.

Let me go back to the red book. It offered a vision of Canada with the economic strength it deserves and the social strength that draws us together as a community. At the beginning of the red book, the man whom Canadians chose as their Prime Minister and whom they continue to support wrote:

The result is a Liberal plan for Canada firmly anchored in the principle that governing is about people, and that government must be judged by its effectiveness in promoting human dignity, justice, fairness, and opportunity. This is our approach, and this election is about presenting that choice to Canadians.

Our platform was based on jobs and growth that would enrich everyone. We understood that people have expectations for their society, not just for their own wallets. That was why one of our commitments was a stronger employment equity act. We were determined that the federal government should do what it could to ensure that Canadians have a fair opportunity to get ahead in life. It draws on the willingness of employers to take a hard look at old practices and to move to a workplace that welcomes the talents of all our citizens.

• (1215)

Quite simply, this bill is about identifying and knocking over barriers that keep some people on the outside looking in or on the bottom looking up. It rests in the best tradition of opening the doors to full participation in Canadian society for all our citizens with all their diversity.

That puts the members of the Reform Party in a bit of a bind as they debate Bill C-64.

[Translation]

They know that incompetent members of designated groups will not take over the workplace. They know that no arbitrary quotas will be imposed. They know that this bill takes into account the concerns voiced by small business. And they know that the bill is fair and reasonable.

[English]

They are reduced to appealing to the worst in people instead of to the best. They are reduced to philosophical musings that are irrelevant to the case before the House and worst case, individual stories pulled from the murky depths of the American right wing. They cannot even get the name of this process right in their efforts to score political points. They seem to believe

that if they use the term affirmative action they can polarize the debate.

One of the most destructive things that can be done in a society or in a Parliament is to polarize the debate, to pit one group against another, rather than to build ties and mutual respect among us.

If they want to talk about the American system, let us look at the record there and then let us compare it to what the government wants to do in this bill so that Canadians, despite the Reform Party members, will know the difference between the American system and ours.

Some 30 years ago the United States began to come to grips with the impact of centuries of racial discrimination. By 1970 Richard Nixon brought in the first affirmative action policies for the U.S. government. Let me remind my hon. friends that Richard Nixon would never be called a bleeding heart, but he did what he knew was right at the time and what his society needed. Other governments, public and private institutions took similar steps.

[Translation]

As the *New York Times* noted recently, this process has yielded results. "In the past 20 years, it said, a substantial number of black families have been able to climb the social and professional ladder. While positive action is not the only reason for this, it certainly played a major role".

[English]

Has the American process been perfect? Has it been what we want to model ourselves on? Absolutely not. In some cases arbitrary approaches were imposed. There were decisions that struck those of us at a distance as odd and unfair. In response that American system too has evolved but they too know there is still much to do.

Ask anyone who watched the public reaction to the Simpson trial and to the ultimate verdict. Race is still an issue in American life. The right wing there and their junior auxiliary in the Reform Party here cannot wish it away.

I believe that Canada begins from a better starting point than the United States. We do not have a clean history when it comes to racism and discrimination but we do not have the same burden of history that the Americans do.

Nonetheless there are barriers still to the full participation of members of designated groups in the economy and therefore to their full participation in society. Creating opportunity through ensuring fairness is the point of Bill C-64. We have chosen a Canadian approach. We have been guided by what works.

I had to go back to the dictionary. After listening to the debate for several days, I was starting to question whether I really understood what the word equity means. This is the Employment Equity Act, not the employment special preference act, as the Reform would have us believe, not the employment discrim-