

*Employment Equity*

God knows, the Bill is weak as a whole and this would be one way to strengthen it. I hope the Government listens to the coalition of the physically handicapped and for once stops listening to the people who pay election contributions to the Conservative Party. Listen to the people of Canada on this particular issue.

**Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East):** Mr. Speaker, I am also pleased to rise to join in on the debate and the request to the Government to reconsider its rather narrow view of "reasonable accommodation" as it relates to this particular amendment. I know the Hon. Member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine East (Mr. Allmand) had an opportunity in committee to suggest a number of changes to the Government. Unfortunately, for some reason the Government chose not to be more specific about the issue of reasonable accommodation.

We can look at the question of reasonable accommodation within this Chamber itself. It was clear today that the potential for participation in the democratic process of the Parliament of Canada was impeded because this Chamber does not have reasonable accommodation. I hope that in the next election campaign, we will be forced into reasonable accommodation by the very fact of electing a person to Parliament who may in fact fit into one of the categories of the disabled, that is, a person in a wheelchair. The ruling of the Chair was to allow 10 wheelchairs into the Chamber following the demonstration this afternoon. I appreciate the logistical problems with which the staff is faced in either removing chairs or permitting more people into the House. But we know that one Canadian in eight has some kind of a handicap. Granted, all of those people are not in wheelchairs. However, if we take that as given, we can estimate that there are hundreds of thousands, indeed millions, of Canadians who suffer some kind of handicap. Yet we only had ten chairs available in the House of Commons on an extraordinary day when there were literally over 100 people from across Ontario, Quebec and other parts of Canada who were demonstrating in front of Parliament.

Quite clearly, we cannot leave the issue of "reasonable accommodation" to the regulations and to the bureaucrats because it speaks to the fundamental issue of access. If we in our own Parliament, in these hallowed halls, do not permit access to the physically disabled who happen to be in wheelchairs, and when we do permit it, it is in such limited numbers, then we must realize we cannot leave the job of that definition to a bureaucrat. I think the other reality—

*[Translation]*

—the other reality is that if we really believe in regulations that will accommodate everyone who wants to work in the community to the best possible extent, if we only want to give the right to regulate, regulations can be changed overnight, without prior notice to the Parliament of Canada. I think that if the Government is really serious about integrating the disabled in the Canadian labour market, one of the fundamental principles is to accommodate them with respect to access to

buildings and to certain guides and tools they need in order to work.

*[English]*

Without reasonable accommodation, all the greatest wishes and good intentions in the world are without purpose. For example, the amendment before us deals with the issue of how many people we can integrate into the workforce. If one works in a building which is not accessible by wheelchair, as is the case in the House of Commons, then a Member who is elected who happens to be in a wheelchair would have to have the system changed around in order to accommodate him or her. We would have to make reasonable accommodation. More often than not employers choose to turn a blind eye to those people from the handicapped community because they do not want to be put in a position of having to make even the most minimal of accommodations. Unfortunately, in many respects, society is still deeply embedded in the prejudice which says that people who have a handicap may not be as productive as other working people. We know that the converse is exactly true. In fact, when handicapped people are given a chance, the only handicap they have is in the way they are viewed by their fellow men and potential employers. We have heard a number of good arguments this afternoon for having a more precise definition of "reasonable accommodation". The definition as suggested by COPOH is fairly broad in that it does not restrict. It states:

"reasonable accommodation" includes, without restriction, the reasonable adaptation of the workplace, hiring practices or the job description to accommodate the needs of designated groups, including the special needs of a qualified disabled person, through provision for physical accessibility, assistive devices, flexible job design and modification, and human support services.

Motion No. 11A is an attempt to clarify a principle which the Government claims to already endorse. The Minister, the Parliamentary Secretary and other representatives of the Government have stated that they endorse the principle of reasonable accommodation. If they endorse it then they should have no hesitation in including it in the law. They should not leave to regulation more precise definitions which would ensure, for example, that accommodation includes the notion of physical accessibility. We too often say that these things take time. I know they take time.

● (1750)

In the context of Governments, I saw not too long ago in the Province of Ontario a detention centre that was opened in the riding of Hamilton—Wentworth. When I asked about accessibility I was told: "We have no need for accessibility. People in wheelchairs are in hospitals". I asked whether or not it was conceivable that somebody in a wheelchair could at some time commit a crime which could necessitate him or her being put into prison. In the mind of the official to whom I was speaking this notion seemed incomprehensible. It was felt that if one is in a wheelchair then one is supposed to be in a hospital. This official just could not make the connection that one can be a productive and competent person in society, also be a criminal and be in a wheelchair. In order to be a criminal