

Government Orders

I understand the hon. member was first on the speaking order and that I would speak second, if that pleases Your Honour.

The Deputy Speaker: The Chair was given a list of three people wishing to speak. The hon. member for Central Nova was the first on the list. Does she wish to cede her place to the hon. member for Rosedale?

Ms. Skoke: Yes.

Mr. Bill Graham (Rosedale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Central Nova for ceding her place to enable me to attend to other business later this afternoon.

Equal access to job opportunities is a principle Canadians adopted several years ago. Other nations think highly of us because we do more than pay lip service to equality. We take proactive steps to make equality a reality in the everyday lives of our citizens.

[Translation]

Bill C-64 will do much to expand opportunities for genuine equality in the workplace for women, aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities and members of visible minorities.

It is our responsibility to ensure that this legislation achieves this important goal whenever possible.

That is why, like many of my colleagues who spoke earlier, I have a serious problem with Motion No. 7 introduced by the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve.

[English]

The hon. member's motion takes the need for co-operation in implementing the Employment Equity Act to an extreme that I do not believe would achieve the desired result. The government's perspective is to do what is necessary to implement and administer Bill C-64 in the most productive way possible but responsibility for implementation administration must remain with employers. They are the ones who ultimately have to answer to the commission if they fail to meet their responsibilities.

Let us consider what would happen if we adopted the hon. member's motion and moved from the bill's current requirements for collaboration between employers and employees to what might be called a co-management arrangement. For one thing, it would reduce the bill's requirement for consultation. The hon. member's motion if adopted would mean that there is no longer any need to consult regarding implementation or revision of employment equity plans.

Bill C-64 as it presently stands allows the commission or a tribunal to order consultation. I find it surprising that the hon. member who is seeking to enrich and improve the bill would want to delete provisions regarding consultations and replace

them with weaker provisions that would not be subject to a direction or order. I would ask him and the party he represents to reconsider the bill from that perspective. It seems to me and to the government that the amendment as proposed actually weakens rather than strengthens the bill, contrary to the avowed intent of the hon. member.

• (1540)

Another Canadian characteristic that makes us the envy of others is our willingness to work together for the collective good of all our citizens. Voluntary collaboration and co-operation are innate qualities of being Canadian. I know many of us in the House seek and strive to enshrine those principles in all the work we do. I have every confidence that management and labour will collaborate to ensure the most effective implementation of employment equity plans. Why should they not? It surely is to the advantage of both.

It is in creating plans and legislation of this kind that one achieves an appropriate balance between the needs of labour and the needs of management. In doing so we have created a labour-management relations atmosphere which is beneficial to both parties. That is what we seek to achieve in this bill.

As my colleagues before me have said, we have already deliberated over the Bloc's concerns in committee. The government feels that having given these concerns due consideration, we are satisfied with the way the provisions now stand.

I remind the hon. member that the Employment Equity Act is designed to help move us closer to true equality in the workplace. It is not designed to change other aspects of employer-employee relationships. However, that would be the unfortunate result if we adopted the hon. member's motion.

The way the bill now stands, collaboration is a requirement. The ultimate responsibility for making decisions however lies with employers and that is the way it should be. There is a difference between the requirement for collaboration and discussion and the ultimate responsibility for the decision which surely must be taken by employers who have both the financial and managerial responsibility for ensuring that those decisions are properly carried out.

Hon. members know from their own experiences that we put much more effort into something when the effort is willingly given and not obtained through coercion. One cannot legislate co-operation and a positive attitude. We have seen that in the workplace and we are trying to strive to avoid confrontational situations in the workplace.

Positive co-operation comes about because the parties involved bring the right attitude to the task at hand. That is what the current provisions in the bill will achieve. They will create an atmosphere within which collaboration, co-operation and discussion will take place.