

Employment Equity

Its mandate was to arrive at a working formula for the application. The Abella Commission, which was established by our Government, clearly had within it the requirements that visible minorities be incorporated as part of any affirmative action program that would be introduced.

[Translation]

Mr. Kilgour: Mr. Speaker, could the Hon. Member inform the House whether, at the time he stepped down from his ministerial duties, there were statistics on each of the four groups mentioned in the Bill, that is, on the labour force participation rate of each group?

[English]

Mr. Axworthy: Mr. Speaker, as you know, under the kind of program we introduced into the Public Service and elsewhere, each Department was required to do a measurement of the employment levels within its own Department relating to women, the handicapped, and visible minorities. Departments said they could not take those particular figures at the time and relate them back to the availability of employees or workers in a category in the general workforce on a city-by-city, region-by-region basis, so in this case there was a wide variety of figures. To use an example, if someone pointed out that the Department of National Revenue was going to hire 100 accountants in the City of Ottawa, and it was clear that in the workforce available at that time 20 per cent were women and they were hiring only 5 per cent, clearly there was a fundamental problem in hiring practices that had to be recorded and eliminated and brought to the attention of Ministers. I do not have offhand the exact figures Department by Department or sector by sector, but it was the responsibility under those affirmative action mandates for each Department to develop those figures and to produce them on an annual basis, at which time one could judge the effectiveness or efficiency to which they were actually measuring up to the availability of the designated target groups in the workforce in the region in which they were working.

Mr. Keeper: Mr. Speaker, just before the Conservative Government came into office the Liberal Party had been in office a good number of years. Yet we find today that there are very few women in senior positions in the Public Service. There is a failure to use contract compliance as it affects the private sector and women are seeking equality in the workplace in the private sector, so how can the Member criticize the Conservatives, who deserve to be criticized on the basis of the legislation, for their lack of action with any real credibility? How does he expect us to believe the protestations of his party when his own Party lived for so many years with the inequality that exists in the workplace today?

Mr. Axworthy: Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether the Hon. Member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Keeper) was here during my remarks but I went through the steps that we have taken.

Mr. Keeper: With what results?

Mr. Allmand: The Human Rights Act in 1977.

Mr. Axworthy: We established a Commission of Human Rights, we had the Charter, we had the development of affirmative action programs in the Public Service, and we put the Abella Commission in place. Each year and each time a series of steps were being taken to correct the problems when and if they did not work. I explained the initial attempt, which was to develop a voluntary affirmative action program, but it did not work. The Hon. Member may be perfect and all-seeing and all-knowledgeable, but we as Liberals do not pretend to have that omniscience. As Minister of Employment and Immigration—I became responsible for that Department in 1980—I saw that the voluntary program was not working and initiated steps to make it work. We had asked the private sector why it was not working, and I explained the reasons given. We then took the necessary action. We started the clear demonstration programs within our own Departments to show them it could work. We then established the Abella Commission to work out a formula which would ensure that it was applied to all companies within the federal jurisdiction. That committee reported on the ways in which to bring back contract compliance. A series of progressive steps have been taken to improve the condition substantially. This opportunity, resulting from the Abella Commission, could have been a capstone to that. It could have brought all those strands together into one very important initiative, and that is what has been lost.

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[Translation]

SUBJECT MATTER OF QUESTIONS TO BE DEBATED

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Papproski): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 66, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: The Hon. Member for Algoma (Mr. Foster)—Agriculture (a) Funding of coloured dairy cattle research. (b) Approval of product; the Hon. Member for York Centre (Mr. Kaplan)—Penitentiaries—Projected construction of prison in Manicouagan constituency; the Hon. Member for Lévis (Mr. Fontaine)—Regulations—Request for clarification of task force created to study certain aspects.