

*Government Orders*

When faced with a person in front of them, by human nature or otherwise, the tendency is, after years and years of good intentions, for employers not to move fast enough. They need some assistance in seeing a way through to doing what they know is in the interests of their businesses which is to have a diversified workforce.

• (1310)

Much progress has been made under current employment legislation and the current act but much more remains to be done. Women are still concentrated in lower paid clerical, sales and service jobs. Maybe that is the place where some hon. members want to see them stay but that is not where this member or this party wishes to them stay.

In the case of aboriginal people, the percentage in the workforce under the act currently is 1.4 per cent compared to 3 per cent in the Canadian population. It is roughly the case with respect to persons with disabilities. They are roughly 6.5 per cent of the overall population but a far lower percentage in the workforce. That is wrong. It denies Canadian businesses the work and dedication of devoted and capable people who can be accommodated and should be received and welcomed as should people who are otherwise among the designated groups.

However, those people still find themselves on the bottom rung of the economic and social ladder. It is not just their problem, which is what I suspect hon. members from the third party think. It is a problem for all of us since restricting the participation of such individuals in the economic life of our country damages the competitiveness of Canadian businesses. Businesses themselves understand that. They endorse many of these proposals. They have been doing a number of things on their own. They have been working with us to develop programs to give effect to the guiding principles encompassed in this legislation. It is good for business and it is good for Canada.

Those businesses realize that recruiting, promoting and retaining people who are representative of the Canadian population helps them provide better and more responsive service since diverse experience and perspectives are a bonus not a burden.

It is useful to note that many business representatives, not usually identified as left wing radicals, appeared before the standing committee in support of the bill. They told us the bill would help them develop a more diverse workforce and give them a competitive edge over less diversified competitors. Diversification in business just is not about one's product line. It is about one's employees as well.

Contrary to the accusations of some members, this bill is not some piece of wild-eyed radicalism, totally divorced from the realities of economic life and experience. Rather, it is a moderate document which seeks to promote equal opportunity in the

workplace without imposing an onerous regulatory environment on business which we recognize is already hard pressed in an increasingly global, competitive marketplace.

For instance, while the act seeks to encourage employers to address under-representation by members of designated groups, it does not require them to hire unqualified people, to create new positions, to create undue hardship or to contradict the merit principle. What we are anxious to see is people hired on their merits regardless of their gender, their colour and other characteristics which have gotten in the way of people with equal merit getting an equal opportunity.

The impact of the bill will be limited since it will only involve those public and private sector organizations and enterprises covered by the Canada Labour Code, about 10 per cent of the workforce. It does not impose quotas or some draconian regime directed from Ottawa as some have suggested. Rather it seeks to help organizations and enterprises develop their own targets for themselves which will allow them to develop a more representative workforce.

To do this, the act will rely on self-identification by employees rather than forcing people to be singled out. There is every indication that such a system should be successful since employees have shown themselves increasingly willing to identify themselves for the purpose of this since the first act was passed in 1986.

In addition, enforcement of the act will not be a reign of terror as conjured up by members of the third party. There is no intention of hounding companies which, not yet fully in compliance with the targets they set, are sincerely trying to reach their goals. Our approach in such situations will be of helping, not harassing. We hope to encourage co-management of this program within enterprises. This means getting workers and management to work together in partnership to ensure the success of the program. While management will bear responsibility since it has the ultimate say in how it manages its affairs, there will be considerable opportunity for both sides to work together on the setting of targets, timetables and implementation strategies.

• (1315)

Success in the area of labour-management co-operation could well prove so rewarding that both parties might then decide to extend this collaboration to other areas of common concern, which would in turn benefit the enterprise as a whole.

Canadians are justly proud of the progress they have made in ensuring fairness and equal opportunity. While the Employment Equity Act of 1986 has led to a number of successes, much remains to be done. We in this party will not cease in our efforts to improve upon what we have done in the past. History does not stop. We gain new experiences every day and we see ways in