

Government Orders

Clearly, legislated equity does not achieve its goals. It is costly and it is unfair. Merit should be the sole hiring criterion in an environment free from arbitrary obstructions to hiring or promotion. Merit must be restored as the sole basis for hiring and promotion in the public service.

Mr. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I often hear hon. members of the Reform Party referring to the Ontario Employment Equity Act. Somehow they try to tell Canadians that we are speaking about the same act.

I would like to take the opportunity to clear up some of the misconceptions that have been stated by the Reform Party. I want to put on the record that our legislation specifically prohibits the imposition of quotas. Another fundamental difference is that Bill C-64 takes a unique human resource planning approach. Ontario's legislation is modelled more on a human rights approach with third party complaints. I would point out that under the Ontario system any person can lay a complaint, including interest groups, job applicants, employees, unions, public or private corporations, or any other individual. There is no such provision in our legislation.

With regard to the rules and regulations that govern the two pieces of legislation, Ontario has set out the obligations of employers in considerable detail and there are extensive provisions for detailed regulations. Bill C-64, on the other hand, is much less prescriptive and minimizes regulatory burden by limiting new regulations to just a few essential areas. A criticism of the Ontario act is the very broad regulation making power it confers on people.

There is a substantial difference in just what is covered by the federal and Ontario legislation. The Ontario act has a much broader scope. For example, the threshold for private sector coverage in Ontario is 50 employees while under Bill C-64 it is 100 employees. Keep in mind as well that the Ontario legislation covers about 17,000 employers while our act targets approximately 350 employers, and many are leaders in the business community.

To enforce its legislation Ontario established two new independent government agencies, the Ontario Employment Equity Commission and the Ontario Employment Equity Tribunal. Hon. members know that Bill C-64 will utilize two existing government agencies, namely Human Resources Development Canada and the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

I trust that I have helped to clarify for the hon. member the key differences that exist between the provincial and federal legislation.

If that is not enough, I would like to remind hon. members of some very interesting survey results. Roughly two thirds of Ontario businesses responding to a poll just after the recent

Ontario election reported that they are in fact in favour of reforming or keeping that province's employment equity law as it is. The business position is reform it but do not repeal it. Only 8 per cent said they would cease implementing employment equity initiatives if the law is repealed, with 69 per cent saying it would not have any impact on their company's equity plans.

I appreciate this time to make some comments. I think that in this debate it is important that the Reform Party face the facts and the truth.

• (1220)

Mr. Frazer: Mr. Speaker, that was very instructive. However, when we talk about quotas, whether we take guidelines or equity of employment for various groups, we are specifying they are quotas. If we say that 5, 10, 20 or 30 per cent of the population falls into certain categories, the implication is that 5, 10, 20 or 30 per cent will be given jobs based on those percentages. This demeans people. It tells them it does not matter how good you are or how hard you can work or how capable you are, you will get your job because you belong to this group. I think that is not only divisive but also is totally and absolutely unfair.

As I said in my previous remarks, in the study on women it has been found that the practice now instituted in the federal hiring system of giving a certain quantity of jobs to women actually undermines their self-confidence. They think maybe they got their jobs because they are women, rather than because they deserve it, they are qualified for it and are good at it. They measure themselves as inadequate and they feel inadequate because they were given preferential treatment for hiring.

The Reform Party wants equality of opportunity for all, regardless of their race, their colour, their gender, their language or whatever. Give them a fair chance at the job. If they are up to it, they will do it and they will do it well; otherwise, they should not be in the job.

Mr. Dick Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, of course I have to say that I support the hon. member in his position on this bill.

The point the Liberals opposite are missing is the principle of this bill. The principle is the social engineers of the Liberal Party are trying to legislate that businesses in this country will have to enter into hiring practices that will be based on things other than merit or abilities.

This country was made strong by Canadian workers who got their education and their training and did everything they could to prepare themselves to be competitive in the marketplace. They did that and achieved individual rewards as a result. As my colleague has pointed out, this bill seeks to destroy that individual initiative by placing special considerations on special groups. What happened to merit? There is no merit mentioned in Bill C-64.