

and apprenticeships for women in the trades and technology areas, where only two per cent or three per cent are represented.

This woman did not write to complain or to ask for special privileges. There was no special pleading. She simply wrote to urge me and members of the House to put an end to discrimination in her industry and other industries. She ended her letter by calling on all members of Parliament to pass Bill C-64: "When you review Bill C-64, think of my five-year-old niece, who wants to grow up to be a builder, just like me".

I invite all members on both sides of the House to join in the spirit this young woman represented. She has asked us to be builders, to build something better, something more open, something fairer, so that all Canadians, men and women, those with certain disabilities, those with certain colours of skin, those with certain handicaps that they have faced over time, can all contribute to the building of this country. That is what we are all about.

I believe this legislation, Bill C-64, gives us a tool to be a good builder, all of us. I hope all members will support this bill.

[Translation]

Mrs. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate, at third reading, on Bill C-64, an act respecting employment equity.

As we have said many times before, the Bloc Québécois supports the principle of employment equity. It also recognizes the importance of this legislation, which must absolutely be effective.

Let us look at the events which lead to this bill. In 1970, in the wake of the Royal commission on the status of women, the federal government set up its first affirmative action programs. However, it was not until 1984, following the report of the Commission on equality in employment, better known as the Abella commission, that the foundations for the current equity policies were laid. The Abella report emphasized the need for special measures to ensure equal opportunities for all, regardless of one's gender, race, ethnic origin or handicap.

The current employment equity legislation, which was passed in 1986, applies to employers and crown corporations governed by federal regulations and employing at least 100 people. The act requires that employers improve job opportunities for designated groups, namely women, aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities and members of visible minorities.

Government Orders

• (1545)

The act also requires that employers eliminate rules and procedures which adversely affect members of these groups, and that employers take concrete action to increase the representation of these groups within their organization. The current provisions also provide for the development of a plan stating the objectives to be reached during a given year, or in subsequent years, as well as a timetable.

Moreover, employers must file an annual report to the Department of Human Resources Development providing all the information relating to the implementation of the act within their organization. That essentially sums up the current legislation on employment equity.

Bill C-64, which is now at third reading, completely replaces that act. The main amendments are as follows. The act will also apply to the federal public service. The elements that must be included in business plans will be better defined. The Canadian Human Rights Commission is now responsible for determining employers' compliance with some of the provisions. It has the power to investigate. An employment equity tribunal is also provided for.

The bill as it stands today by the government is an improved version. During the first debate on this bill 10 months ago, I denounced some of its flaws. I am happy to note that the witnesses who appeared before the standing committee succeeded in convincing some members to improve the bill.

Nor should we forget the amendments proposed by my colleague from Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, some of which were accepted. Unfortunately, there were two with which the committee disagreed and to which I will get back in a moment.

Contrary to what my Reform colleagues claim, I think that a law on employment equity is both desirable and necessary. Let us listen to what Glenda Simms, President of the former Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, said when she appeared before the standing committee last February: "We have been defending since 1975 the idea that the Employment Equity Act is a way to achieve equality for women in the work place. Over the past decade, the extent to which women, as a group, are facing serious and systemic inequalities on the labour market, particularly in terms of compensation, working conditions and job access, is explained at length in many reports both within government and outside. Women are not evaluated on the basis of personal merit, but rather their race, their sex and whether or not they are disabled".

Consequently, women are overrepresented in lower paying positions. Approximately 60 per cent of all women to whom job equity applies have clerical jobs and they are severely underrepresented in management positions. White males without disabilities still hold 78 per cent of management job in the public service.