

*Private Members' Business*

• (1755)

Women are frequently members of more than one designated group, what we call the double disadvantaged and maybe in my case triple disadvantaged. Imagine how much more difficult it is for women to compete who are aboriginal, a visible minority or someone with a disability. People in these groups are particularly subject to prejudice in hiring.

Bias is the only apparent explanation for the fact that the unemployment rate among visible minorities, aboriginal people and people with disabilities with university degrees is much higher than for white males with the same education. In fact, it can be more than double.

Reports submitted by employers under the Employment Equity Act show some worrisome trends in the hiring rates of individuals in designated groups. The same reports show that the situation for persons with disabilities is even worse. I can go on and cite other instances, but I ask the House if these figures suggest that members of designated groups enjoy preferential treatment? The answer is self-evident.

The hon. member cited the fact that in his riding he could not find one individual who was subjected to inequity. I would remind the hon. member that the Employment Equity Act is designed to ensure that an employer's hiring and promotion decisions are based solely on the bona fide requirements of an occupation and not on any other job related criteria.

The Employment Equity Act ensures that only qualified individuals be considered for a job, but most important it requires employers to remove barriers to employment for capable candidates who are members of the designated groups so we can turn these unacceptable unemployment figures around, which is only fair.

The Canadian human rights commissioner, Mr. Yalden, has reason to be concerned. The anachronistic thinking associated with this motion certainly will do nothing to advance us toward our goal of preparing Canada for the global economy of the 21st century.

It ignores the reality that we will soon experience a severe skills shortage in the country that will demand that we put every capable Canadian to work. It disregards the fact that two-thirds of new entrants to the labour market will be members of the designated group by the year 2000, a large percentage of whom are more than qualified to meet the challenge. It overlooks the importance of capitalizing on these people's diversities in an increasingly specialized, interconnected and international economy.

It is lucky for us that this is not a votable motion because it would have been voted down by members on this side of the House. The motion could have had the opportunity to, if, heaven

forbid, there was an opportunity for it to be a votable motion, condone racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination, all of which we know exist in the workplace. It would permit prejudice to go unchecked and may even encourage outright acts of physical or sexual harassment of the most vulnerable.

The Employment Equity Act is not about counting numbers as the member would have us believe. It is about instituting irritating rules and regulations that somehow stand in the way of individuals in this society from being contributing members and full participants in Canadian society.

I ask every member of the House to stand firm the Employment Equity Act.

[Translation]

**Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonnette, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am both disappointed and disturbed that today members are asked to consider a motion which seems to be totally removed from reality and that, with all due respect for its author, appears to be based on a completely erroneous interpretation of the Employment Equity Act.

I would like to point out that the hon. member seems to associate the existence of the Employment Equity act with a tendency on the part of some employers to hire incompetent people. To make this kind of connection encourages prejudice and is entirely absurd.

Before going any further, I would like to recall for the benefit of our listeners and of our colleagues in this House that the sole purpose of the Employment Equity Act, which has existed since 1986, is to ensure that our labour force is more representative of Quebec and Canadian society.

• (1800)

To achieve this, we ask employers to try, as part of their hiring practices, to include four so-called designated groups, namely women, aboriginal people, visible minorities and disabled people, in view of the fact that in the labour market, people do not all have the same opportunities, and there are people who are discriminated against and who have trouble getting the jobs for which they are qualified. To think that because we have an Employment Equity Act like the one we have had since 1990 and which we are in the process of reviewing, there is some connection between the existence of this Act and the practice of some employers to hire incompetent people, is patently absurd.

I may recall that section 6 of the old and the new Employment Equity Act clearly says:

the obligation to implement employment equity does not require an employer

(a) to take a particular measure to implement employment equity where the taking of that measure would cause undue hardship to the employer;

(b) to hire or promote unqualified persons.