

*Government Orders*

By giving preferential treatment to native businesses in government procurement, the government hopes to provide a sustainable economic base for native self-government. However, employment equity carries a stigma and a presumption of racial or gender inferiority. Equity programs do not remove sex and race bias from the workplace; they institutionalize them.

Brian Lee Crowley's article "Does counting bodies add up to fairness?" details findings of a 1987 study. What happens when women are promoted under a program emphasizing gender over ability is that they consistently rated their performance more negatively, took less credit for successful outcomes, were less eager to persist in their leadership roles. They also viewed themselves as more deficient in leadership skills. In other words, it diminished their worth in their own eyes.

• (1210)

In other areas such as education, law school, if doors are opened to individuals who are ill prepared to take on the challenge, the outcome can lead to failure and creates a dependency on government programs rather than fair competition.

This spring the supreme court sent a clear message the charter is meant to protect individual rights rather than group rights. Section 15 of the charter of rights and freedoms claims Canadians are equal before and under law. It adds governments cannot override this basic equality to enhance groups disadvantaged because of their race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

Madam Justice McLachlin in the Miron case stated the larger purpose is simply the protection of individual human dignity and freedom which are violated whenever individuals are denied opportunities based on the stereotypical application or presumed group characteristics rather than on the basis of individual merit, capacity or circumstance.

This hard hitting ruling clearly spells out that every person has the right to be judged on his or her own merits and not on the basis of group characteristics.

Reform's minority report to the standing committee's report "Employment Equity: A Commitment to Merit" has two very clear messages: employment competition based on the merit principle is key to both equality and productivity, and that employment equity legislation is the denial of basic human rights. I encourage all members of the House to read that report. It is not the status quo, but it does contain pertinent facts that tend to be glossed over.

Politically, employment equity gives the appearance of being the expedient means to achieve equity in the workplace; it is politically correct. It is hard for the government to move into new directions, to change the status quo. We grant that.

In the example I quoted earlier, on the Harris government's scrapping the employment equity law we heard screams of "unfair". For some, change becomes uncomfortable and they are unable to envisage innovative directions where there is equality of opportunity.

The government is intent on moving forward with a new law without a proper review. I stated earlier that some government agencies would be exempt, defence being one. The Department of National Defence has conducted a diversity survey which could be and probably will be a step toward affirmative action. During the defence review Liberal members pushed to have hiring quotas official defence policy. The Canadian forces anti-racism policy does exempt affirmative action programs from classification as racism.

In the 1970s promotion of thousands of francophones was distorted by going well down promotion lists to find someone with a suitable background. By this I do not mean 10, 15 or 20 names, I mean 40 or more. The same is going on at the moment for women, although to a lesser extent. Eleven per cent of the Canadian forces are women.

If all Canadians are equal before and under the law, we must not continue to support laws that patronize designated groups, in essence assume their mediocrity. Merit should be the underlying principle. Anything that detracts from the merit principle, civilian or military, is bad policy. Diversity studies clearly signal the government is moving to introduce characteristics other than merit to hiring or promotion programs.

Government's role should be to ensure equality of opportunity rather than the equality of results in the public sector. It is government's responsibility to provide a standard of secondary education which is accessible to all, local responsive post-secondary institutions, affordable student loans based on need, bursaries and scholarships based on need and excellence, sensitivity training in the public sector which supports inherent equality, dignity and worth of all.

We should ensure that laws against discrimination are enforced. Government should lead by example, by laying out objective testing regimes, by broad based advertising of all job postings and by offering facilities to accommodate disabled people wherever they may work. As Madam Justice McLachlin pointed out, the protection of individual human dignity and freedom is important for all.

• (1215)

We are not all equal in ability. Those who wish to pursue education or a vocation should not face discrimination barriers. Those who pursue this course deserve to reap the benefits and rewards of hard work.