

Employment Equity

moment the commission does not have the resources. At the moment, it deals on a reactive mode, on a one-to-one basis, not as an agency which has the ability to oversee this type of legislation on a national basis. Even if members of the Government were convinced that that was the answer, then the very least they could have done was to have the courage to include a provision with respect to the Human Rights Commission in the legislation. In this way we would have been convinced that some mechanism would be put in place to oversee the legislation. However, the amendment in this respect was not accepted. Individual people in the four target groups and members of my Party are asking why. If one believes that the Human Rights Commission is the answer, then let us be frank and put a provision with respect to it in the legislation.

Another of our amendments suggested that the Bill apply to all federal government Departments which are presently exempted from the Bill. If we have a federal Government which says: "This is our vision. This is what we want the private sector and the Crown corporations to do", then what is wrong with not pursuing that and having the force of those measures obligate the federal Government to act accordingly? After all, we have to show leadership and we can only do that by example.

Another amendment we suggested based on representations we received at committee stage was to apply the Bill to all businesses under federal jurisdiction with 25 or more employees. The present Bill applies to businesses with 100 or more employees. That very regulation does away with most of the companies doing business with the Government since a great number of them—the majority I am told—have less than 100 employees. Therefore, we suggested that the threshold be placed at 25. Even the Americans, whom we sometimes hit over the head when we talk about human rights, have contract compliance legislation which ensures that businesses doing business with the Government follow its criteria. Its criterion is for only 50 employees, and we are stuck at 100.

Mr. Speaker, I notice that you are motioning to me that I have but one minute left in which to wrap up. There were other amendments I wanted to go over, but I will not have the time to do that.

So what is the choice? What are we trying to suggest at third reading? To put it very simply, as an eleventh hour pitch, it is to reconsider the inaction of this legislation and to consider the inequities in it. It is ironic that we should be pushing employment equity while at the same time we know that the legislation has tremendous shortcomings. This message does not come from members of the New Democratic Party or from members of the Liberal Party. It comes from Canadians who are saying that the Bill will not deliver equity. It is only window-dressing. We encourage the Government and the Parliamentary Secretary, who is here on behalf of the Minister, to heed the recommendations and make the Bill what we all want it to be—strong, effective and fair. I hope the Government sees the light.

Mr. David Orlikow (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, it should be obvious to any Member of Parliament, and certainly to anyone who represents an urban constituency, that there still exists a great deal of discrimination against members of minority groups in employment. By minority groups I include the handicapped, native people, women, and members of racial minority groups, particularly those who come from visible minorities, that is, non-whites. Governments, both federal and provincial, recognize that such prejudice and discrimination have existed for many years. So Governments have, over the years, enacted fair employment and fair accommodation practices legislation. This legislation has somewhat lessened the discrimination in employment felt by members of these groups. However, a great deal of discrimination still exists. Thus a broad coalition of organizations including natives, women, the handicapped and minority groups, as well as church groups, labour, consumer and farm groups have understood that more has to be done. The former Liberal Government appointed Judge Abella to look into the matter. She conducted an investigation and made a report to which all of us should have paid some attention.

Before the election the groups I have mentioned, and others, called upon the political Parties to find out what their stand would be in regard to passing the type of legislation which Judge Abella, and others, had recommended. I have in front of me part of a statement made by the present Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) in August of 1984. He said:

Our Party will ensure that companies providing services to the federal Government hire increasing numbers of women to perform such services. When seeking government business, these companies will be required to detail their action plans, timetables and programmes for attracting, training and advancing women within their operations . . . We support the need for human resources planning within the federal bureaucracy, which includes goals and objectives to achieve parity for women, at all levels of government operation, commensurate with their skills and expectations.

● (1700)

Let me put on the record the last sentence. I hope the Parliamentary Secretary is listening carefully because this is the crux of our fundamental disagreement with the Government and the Bill. The Prime Minister, then Leader of the Official Opposition, concluded the paragraph which I just read by saying the following:

Numerical goals are one of several goals required: training and retraining are others.

That was a promise made by the Prime Minister when he was Leader of the Official Opposition at a time when we were heading into an election which he hoped his Party would win so that he could become the Prime Minister. His Party did win the election. He is the Prime Minister. What has happened to the commitment he made?

If there is one thing that is conspicuously missing from this Bill, it is the promise made by the Prime Minister that the legislation his Government would bring forward would include numerical goals. The experience of other jurisdictions, including the United States, is that without numerical goals, the objective of employment equity will not be reached.