

*Employment Equity*

the employment hopes and aspirations which they have developed over the last number of years. It does not reply to the concerns of the visible minorities or to native groups.

To whom does this legislation reply? It replies to the real bosses of the Conservative Party—the large corporations which have now been called upon by the federal government to report. Once they make their reports they can devise their action plans. However, they can keep these action plans private and secret in the confines of their own corporate boardrooms. They can deny, even to the target groups cited by the Minister, an opportunity to examine these plans to determine whether, in fact, they are delivering on their promises of employment equity.

*[Translation]*

The Minister (Ms. MacDonald) and the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) said they preferred to use the voluntary approach when dealing with equality matters and employment equity. However, Mr. Speaker, we all know that the voluntary approach does not work with companies, especially the big companies which see making a profit as their primary responsibility. We know that in a period of economic recession such as we have known between 1981 and 1983, all these companies got rid of those identified as belonging to minority groups such as women and visible minorities. All the jobs held by these people were cut during this period, and now the same companies are being asked to change the rules of the game on a voluntary basis.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think we can seriously believe that this is what these big companies are going to do, especially when we see that even the Government is not willing to play according to the rules.

*[English]*

The Equality for All Report put forward some fairly significant recommendations. It was an all-Party unanimous report which specifically cited Bill C-62, the legislation which we are discussing today, as being discriminatory. The report stated that the Bill goes against the spirit of the Charter. It was cited as being discriminatory because of the fact it exempts the federal Government. Here we have the federal Government reaching out to companies which employ 100 or more people and saying: "We are asking you to launch an action plan on a voluntary basis and to table it. We are also asking you to launch affirmative action programs within your companies. However, we are not prepared, in a substantive way, through law as opposed to legislation, to submit ourselves to the same type of public scrutiny". On the one hand the Government is saying: "Yes, we are calling upon private sector companies on the federal scene to come across with affirmative action plans; but we are not prepared to make the same requirement of ourselves in legislation".

The Minister will say that the Treasury Board is handling this matter through regulation. However, as has already been pointed out, any regulation can be abolished as quickly as it can be written. If the federal Government is really serious

about showing the lead in this particular area, then it is extremely important, as was cited by the committee on equality rights, that at the very least the federal Government be covered by all aspects of Bill C-62.

The second point—

*[Translation]*

Mr. Speaker, the major drawback of this Bill is that it applies only to companies with at least 100 employees. We know that most companies will not be affected by this legislation because the majority of Canadian companies are small businesses with fewer than 100 employees.

What happens to those companies with only 25, 30 or 40 employees? As the Hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine East (Mr. Allmand) has suggested, we might at least follow the example of the United States where all companies with more than 15 employees are included.

All such companies in the United States are governed by federal employment equity regulations. Very reasonable and dedicated as he is, the Hon. Member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine East recommended that the Bill might be made applicable only to companies with more than 25 employees. He did not suggest that all small businesses should be affected. There is nothing extraordinary about that, Mr. Speaker, considering that the Canada Labour Code applies to all companies with at least five employees. We are being quite reasonable when we urge the Government to amend that part of the Bill under which all companies with fewer than 100 employees are exempted.

*[English]*

The Hon. Member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine East put forth a number of extremely reasonable amendments—in fact, almost three dozen amendments—which dealt with the sum and substance of the Bill. They attempted to redress some of the inequities which had already been outlined by the all-Party committee studying equality rights. Unfortunately, notwithstanding the rhetoric of the Minister and the Government, and notwithstanding the support for these amendments by every single group which the Bill claims to represent, the Minister and the Government refused to endorse most of them. In fact, only two or three amendments, which were certainly not the meat of the matter, were accepted by the Government.

It is disappointing, particularly when one considers that one of the major promises made by the Prime Minister—oh, how I remember his words—was that he would apply contract compliance immediately upon being elected to Government. He said that not only would the Government come in line with employment equity where it deals with all federal Government employees, but any company which wanted to do business with the federal Government must, of necessity, develop a plan of affirmative action so that the contract compliance principle which has been well-tested in the United States could be applied here in Canada. That is what the Prime Minister said when he was the Leader of the Opposition when he was going