

*Employment Equity*

the opportunity to be defeated, an opportunity they so richly deserved and took advantage of in 1984.

Long before 1984 the consensus had been created that it was time for real employment equity in this country, and real affirmative action. We went so far not so long ago as to enshrine in our constitution a reference to affirmative action, which highlighted that as a mechanism for bringing about greater equality in this country. I do not think, with all due respect to the individual and local initiatives that the Member from Ottawa-Vanier pointed out, the Liberal Party can be let off the hook for the lack of action which it demonstrated with respect to this particular issue while it was in Government.

I want to say also that I think it is a good time to reflect on what I suppose is tragically common in the political life of this country, and perhaps others as well, and that is the gap, sometimes a horrendous gap, between promise, expectation and reality. In August, 1984 the then Leader of the Opposition and now Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) said, and I quote:

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 programs 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 operations, commensurate with their skills and expectations.

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

That was offered to the Canadian public by our current Prime Minister when he was running for office in 1984. The result of that rhetoric, which was part of an over-all and considerably transparent election strategy, was to promise everything to everybody. The Conservatives in 1984 were going for broke. They were not going to offend anybody. Whatever you wanted, they were on your side. If you did not want to test the Cruise missile, neither did they. If you wanted to test the Cruise missile, so did they. It did not matter what your position was you could find a Tory who would respond positively to your feelings and to your concerns.

This Bill has become an example of the disappointment and the cynicism which that kind of election strategy, however successful—and certainly no one would argue about the success of it—eventually results in. There was an expectation with respect to this issue that the Government would live up to its promises in this regard, an expectation that has been sorely violated by the reality of the legislation that we have before us. We can quote now from Beryl Potter of the Coalition on Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities the following statement:

Like the bill—it's not even worth the paper it's written on—I've never been so disillusioned in my life as I am with Prime Minister Mulroney. I was a supporter of him. I worked for him in his campaign and I am totally, totally disillusioned.

A good example of the gap between promise, expectation created and promoted by the Conservative Party, and now the disappointment that comes with legislative reality, is the fact that the Progressive Conservative Government has not been

willing to respond to a social consensus that is already there. It is not as if the Conservative Party was being asked to do something terribly radical. I feel, as I think others feel, that for some time we have been at a point in our social and political thinking where governments could afford to move on this without any great danger to themselves. We have to ask ourselves the question, why does the Progressive Conservative Government, having taken the trouble to devise legislation and to cause the House of Commons to debate this for many, many hours, not take the trouble to do the job right while it was taking the trouble to do the job at all?

I think the reason for that is that when the Conservatives got into the business of promising everything to everybody as an electoral strategy they were involved in contradicting themselves at a great many turns, particularly when they made the kinds of promises they made with respect to employment equity, as well as in some other areas. I say that because I do not think any member of the Conservative caucus would deny that they have a fundamental commitment to the market-place as the arena where certain kinds of decisions are made, indeed, where a great many important decisions are made as far as Progressive Conservatives are concerned, and where those kinds of decisions ought to be made according to Progressive Conservatives. The Progressive Conservatives believe that the market-place is the final arbiter of who will get what job, how they will be paid and organized, et cetera.

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When the Progressive Conservative Party promised employment equity, it was either unconsciously engaged in a form of intellectual self-contradiction or it was consciously misleading Canadians about what was intended. In the final analysis, I believe the Progressive Conservative Party was true to its own principles.

While that is understandable, it should have been honest enough to say long ago that the ideal of enforced employment equity in the market-place, which these groups have called for, was against its fundamental principles about how the economy should run. A proper democratic debate could then have occurred.

There could have been a real debate in this country about how our economy should be organized and what should be properly left to the market-place and what should be properly accomplished through the enforcement mechanisms that these groups and the New Democratic Party have been calling for. However, that debate has not taken place because the Progressive Conservative Party decided in 1984 that it would not have any real debate. The Conservatives were going to keep their cards close to their chests and would indicate to the public only that which it wanted it to know.

We have discovered that the Conservatives did not mean what they were saying, that our criticisms of the Conservatives over the years have been correct. The fact is that the Conservative Party is not capable of acting against the wishes of the business community in this country. Clearly, that is the