

Statements by Ministers

While we appreciate the fine words and rhetoric in the same way as we appreciated the lovely concert on Sunday night which was going to make all things accessible to all Canadians, the federal Government has not directed a single penny toward municipalities which want to improve their infrastructure in order to make their streets and municipal buildings accessible. Not one penny of federal money has been directed toward access awareness on the ground where it really counts.

In the same way, this legislation has absolutely no possibility for enforcement because there is no penalty provided and no mechanism in place to ensure that employers go ahead with employment equity. That is why you see employers—

[Translation]

... like the Maritime Employers Association which claims to comply with Bill C-62 but tells its employees who have been employed for 10, 12 or 15 years that they have to take tests, and at the same time they don't hire minorities, women or visible minorities.

So why is this situation being tolerated? Mr. Speaker, it is being tolerated because the Government introduced a Bill, said it would do something to provide for employment equity, but failed to provide an enforcement mechanism.

[English]

This is like setting up a Criminal Code amendment and telling a bank robber that he is not allowed to rob a bank but if he does there is no penalty, take the money and run. How can you have an employment equity bill which has no enforcement mechanism, no penalty against employers who do not comply, and absolutely no structure in place to make sure that employers are complying? The only compliance requirement is that they report. They can report that they are doing nothing and that is fine, that is totally within the ambit of this phoney piece of legislation.

I am not particularly happy about this statement, Mr. Speaker. I am not happy about a series of statements which have come from the Government which are nothing more than flowery rhetoric. We should hang our heads in shame to think that in 1986, for the first time since statistics were kept, under this Government the wage gap between men and women got wider rather than narrower. If we do not do something by way of amendment to improve legislation, in 10 or 20 years from now we will be giving the same speeches in the House of Commons.

[Translation]

Yes, the road is hard and rocky, and it is a long road. We are nearing the twenty-first century, and nothing has been done because although the Government was willing to make some nice, impressive speeches, it did not want to act and use legislation to require employers to set up employment equity programs.

[English]

That being said, Mr. Speaker, I certainly cannot endorse this statement.

Mr. Ernie Epp (Thunder Bay—Nipigon): Mr. Speaker, the Minister has made a statement on advances in employment equity as she sees them. She has spoken about the good things that will happen under the employment equity Bill. This is another case of rhetoric being put forward as the next election draws near to try to suggest to Canadians that a great deal has been accomplished when the reality is so very far from that. When those Canadians who are in the target groups; aboriginal peoples, the disabled, visible minorities, and women—to put them in alphabetical order rather than in order of the numbers of their groups—consider their situation and learn what the reports will tell them, they will know that the Government failed profoundly in Bill C-62 a couple of years ago in refusing to recognize the necessity of doing far more than calling for reports.

● (1120)

According to a Canadian Press report today, 70 per cent of the disabled are unemployed. The federal Government will discover those realities with respect to Crown corporations and areas under federal regulation upon which this legislation focuses, but what good will only having information about the shortcomings of employment do for those people?

The sad realities of inequity in employment in the past required far more action than is taking place. Of course, the Government tries to make much more of it.

[Translation]

The Minister said, and I quote:

Under this legislation all federally-regulated employees, Crown corporations as well as private sector businesses, are required to eliminate employment barriers, to adopt special measures and to make arrangements to accommodate certain differences.

Actually, the legislation only requires employers to submit these reports. It does not require them to prepare a longer term strategy.

[English]

The most profound failure in this employment equity Bill is the Government's failure to require an action plan by employers. It is not for lack of attempts by the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Opposition to amend the Bill and strengthen it in ways that we see this end result.

The Minister praised her colleague, the former Minister of Employment and Immigration, the Minister of Communications (Miss MacDonald), who introduced the Bill. She stubbornly stood by the draft that had been put forward. While there were some minor amendments, the major amendments required to make this a genuine employment equity Bill were refused. The Minister's colleagues stood by that Bill and refused to make the required changes. Therefore, there is no point in joining the Minister in any praise for her