

Employment Equity

steps which had been taken. We know that on occasion exchanges of a somewhat bipartisan nature are made across the floor of the House, but that is not an excuse for distorting the truth, which is what the Minister of Employment and Immigration did three days ago in the House. In response to a question by my colleague from Toronto, she said that the previous Government had done nothing at all. That is not the way to approach a matter as crucial as this one. She should have properly recognized the past history and development which had occurred, as well as the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. She should have indicated that very important steps have been taken. This Bill could have been a capstone to pull together all those elements. Instead, it is a retreat, a withdrawal, or a side-step. She is directly responsible for having broken the momentum. When will we get a chance again? Some people will say that the legislation is now in place, but I believe that the forward movement or the sense of forward progress has been rechannelled. We are really reverting back to what we had in the 1970s and 1980s. In effect, it is voluntary and up to the good intentions of individual employers to make it work. How can they revert to something that has already been proven not to work? Why do they ignore history?

Ms. Mitchell: They make the same mistakes as the Liberals.

Mr. Axworthy: That indicates the stupidity of the NDP on matters such as this one; we both believe in the same thing and yet they make silly remarks.

Ms. Mitchell: Why only three Departments?

Mr. Axworthy: I just explained that. It is too bad the Hon. Member does not listen; it is unfortunate that she does not listen.

I am making a speech in the House because I believe deeply in what we are trying to accomplish. We were making progress. We knew what we had to face. There was strong opposition in the private sector. We had to show that they could work. We had to give the private sector a demonstration, and we have succeeded in doing that. We had to build up a consensus and show that progress was being made.

Ms. Mitchell: And back away from mandatory.

Mr. Axworthy: I realize that members of the NDP and the Conservative Party do not believe in developing that kind of practical common sense. I point out to the Hon. Member that some of her colleagues in the provinces have been less than progressive. I recall attending a meeting of provincial Premiers, including Mr. Blakeney and Mr. Pawley, and saying that we wanted to talk about how to put affirmative action across the board in provincial sectors. Guess who opposed it at that time, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Mitchell: Not the NDP.

Mr. Axworthy: Members of the provincial Government which she supports, because they were not interested in making that kind of progress.

Ms. Mitchell: Not the NDP—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Order, please. There will be time for questions and comments after the Hon. Member finishes his speech. I should like to hear what he has to say. The Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry (Mr. Axworthy) has the floor.

Mr. Axworthy: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your willingness to listen to this important debate. I am glad someone is prepared to listen. Certain members of the NDP have forgotten long ago how important listening is.

At this point in time there is a willingness in the country to accept a change. I believe the business community has been sufficiently softened up.

Mr. Kilgour: Tell us about it.

Mr. Axworthy: I will tell the Hon. Member about it. I have spent a lot of time working with that community on it. The Hon. Member for Edmonton—Strathcona (Mr. Kilgour) is allowing the editorials in the *Edmonton Journal* to go to his head. The fact is that we had acquired and obtained a recognition or an agreement on what choices and decisions should be made. When the Bill was ready to be brought forward, a consensus was in place. However, the Government stepped away from that consensus and fragmented that agreement.

I should like to return to the debate of the Minister of Employment and Immigration on second reading. She said that it was just a start and that we should come to committee with amendments. She said that she was open, prepared to make changes, and wanted to listen to the groups. We have heard what the groups indicated before the committee. They repeated what was indicated by the Abella Commission, that we required a comprehensive, univervally applied program at least within the federal jurisdiction. However, that was ignored. Therefore, any pretext that this will somehow further eliminate or reduce systemic discrimination in the country is a falsehood. It will not work.

Aside from the individual cases of frustration and sense of alienation which many people in the workplace now feel, we will also lose an incredible amount of talent. We will be losing the abilities which people could have put in place had they been given the opportunities that a real affirmative action program would have provided.

In my region of western Canada 30 per cent of all new workers coming into the labour market will be people of native Canadian origin, yet they face the most serious detriments by far to obtaining equal opportunities in the workplace. The talents and abilities which they could bring in terms of new jobs and occupations will be lost. As was the case in the past, they will be pushed to the margin. There will be speeches by various Conservative Members of Parliament, such as the Hon. Member for Selkirk—Interlake (Mr. Holtmann), saying