

Government Orders

• (1535)

I have heard from the hon. gentleman opposite, so let me give him a list of other companies from his own region that are endorsing it: Canadian National Railway, the Bank of Montreal, Sun Life, the Royal Bank of Canada, B.C. Hydro. Alberta Government Telephones is endorsing it. I do not know how far he wants to stretch the case, but by extension I suppose we could say that Ralph Klein is in favour of this, or at least his crown corporation is.

To make the point more directly, in a Compas poll that was done of Ontario companies when the debate was going on, only 8 per cent of Ontario companies said they would stop their programs if the employment equity law was repealed, and 68 per cent, more than two-thirds, said that they would continue with an employment equity program once it was established and they had learned the value of it.

There is a value in fairness. Canadians understand it, businesses understand it. The only people who do not seem to understand it are certain members opposite, who are still probably reading whatever strange imported foreign based literature they derive their ideas from. Perhaps if they could look at the Canadian case, look at the practicality of how it has worked, look at the value it has, then we might get more light and less heat from the members opposite.

I am going to speak for a moment to the members of the Reform Party.

Mr. McCormick: There are three here now.

Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Three important members of the Reform Party.

I think it is very important that the members of the Reform Party understand there are things that government can do and must do well. When they said in their minority report—

Mr. McClelland: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I assume that it is not customary to refer to the absence or the non-absence of members.

The Speaker: I did not hear anything about the absence or non-absence.

Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, I am ready to address myself to the vast hordes of Reform members who are on the opposite benches. It is simply a function of education. There are times when I fall back into old habits of trying to say let us learn together in the House.

When they put out in their minority report their opposition based on a false premise, one has to take issue with it. One wonders, as we found today in question period, whether some members of the House actually read the legislation we present. We heard today from members of the Bloc that they had not read the bill on HRD. We tabled it four months ago and they got around to raising questions four months later, which has

something to do with a certain date at the end of October, I suppose.

Clearly Reform members have not read clause 6 of this bill: "The obligation to implement employment equity does not require an employer to hire or promote unqualified persons". With respect to the public sector, it requires that hiring or promotion be based on selection according to merit. In the report there are many references to merit being done away with and quotas being imposed, yet the legislation says the opposite.

Clause 33, which I know is way down the bill and takes at least five minutes to get to, reads: "The commission may not give a direction and no tribunal may make an order where that direction or order would impose a quota on an employer". Is that pretty clear, that no commission or tribunal can make any order imposing a quota?

Again, why does the Reform Party, in its members' speeches, its minority reports, in its public language, say that quotas are being imposed? Does it have a secret bill we do not know about? Has it written something we do not know about, which it is going to pop unsuspectingly on the Canadian public? It could be, but it has nothing to do with Bill C-64. It is important we understand that.

• (1540)

Mr. White (Fraser Valley West): Tell them about the RCMP, Lloyd.

Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): He is the one who calls the RCMP all the time, not me.

How much clearer can we be? When we ensure that all deserving people have more chance, more opportunity to apply for a job, get training, get a promotion, does that not mean a better achievement of the merit principle?

When we ask companies to examine their own assumptions about the tangible and intangible qualities it takes to do a job, when we examine what it is we want from our workers, how we can improve their skills, how we can ensure that there are not false barriers based upon old habits and old wisdoms impeding the development of that human resource in the workplace, does that not also improve the achievement of merit?

The employment equity bill is about making merit work. It is real and demonstrable in a practical way in the workplace. It is about opening doors that have been closed for far too long and for far too many people. That is why I believe Canadians support this legislation. They know that our society will work better if everybody has a chance to work.

I quote from a letter I received from a young woman who works in the construction industry. She has been having trouble keeping her job because only 2.4 per cent of construction workers are women. I should say by way of information that we have established a special program in my department called women in trades and technology. We have put together a council of employers across Canada to specifically promote internships