

*Employment Equity*

people for asking why this piece of legislation was introduced. Why Bill C-62? Why name the four target groups? Why does the Government say it is championing the rights of these Canadians in these four target groups? Why say that after these four target groups have said that this legislation will not help? They are saying that this legislation will not improve the lots of these individuals, and they are right. Why have a piece of legislation for the sake of having legislation which is used as window dressing? It is just used in a public relations type of way so that the Government can say: "Look at what we have done for these groups".

These four target groups and other Canadians who have participated in the process are not that gullible or naive. They know when they have effective legislation and when they do not. They have told Parliament and the Government that this legislation is not adequate. Therefore, it must be incumbent upon Members of this House to listen to those concerns and perhaps put ourselves in their place. We must realize what their day-to-day struggles are and ask ourselves how we would react if we were one of those individuals who came before the committee. If we did that, I think we would have a greater degree of appreciation for and sensitivity to the representations made before the committee, rather than simply listening and not moving on the recommendations.

We must also examine our own hearts as individual Members of Parliament. We all know that one of the major concerns we face in our responsibility as Members of Parliament is the whole question of employment. We face a number of individuals each and every week in our constituency offices. Individuals write, phone and visit us and all ask if we can give any assistance to them, their relatives or friends who are seeking gainful employment. We know their frustration. We know their loss of hope. We know that, to a certain degree, the measure of one's self worth and dignity is in part related to the whole question of employment. A working life is a fruitful and fulfilling life. When there is no gainful employment, it is not just a question of not being able to find work but it is the feeling, rightly or wrongly, that one is less than a participating member in Canadian society. We all realize that that is the biggest problem facing us as Members of Parliament individually and collectively.

I believe most of us accept that responsibility. The problems of those four target groups must be staggering when those individuals are unemployed because the colour of their skin is different from that of the majority or because they have a disability or because of their cultural background. That is a defeating type of blow which is difficult to overcome. We must understand that. We must act more boldly and courageously so that we can be satisfied as Members of Parliament and as the House of Commons that we have acted with a sensitivity and appreciation for the problems of these four different groups. We should be able to point to this legislation in a proud manner which transcends partisan politics. We should be able to have a good deal of pride in the legislation. But we cannot have pride in Bill C-62 in its present form. It is not a question

of myself as a member of the Opposition slamming the Government by saying: "Look at this legislation. Are you not ashamed". I feel part of that shame as well because I know we could have done much better.

It does not help the debate when individuals talk about what the Liberal Government did five years ago or what the Conservative Government did 40 years ago. It does not further the lot of these four target groups. What we should realize is that here is the window of opportunity. For the first time before the House of Commons we have a piece of legislation which is intended to deliver employment equity regardless of colour, handicap, sex or background. We should work together to ensure that the legislation will meet the expectations created by the Abella Commission. But when it does not, no one in the House can rise and beat his or her chest saying: "I am proud to stand up today because we have Bill C-62". We cannot do that when the four target groups have come to us at second reading, at committee and at report stage of the legislation to tell us that we are not going far enough and are only paying lip service to their real problems. They are saying to us: "Maybe these problems are not for you, but they are for me and for the other people who find themselves in my circumstances". They are Canadians. We have a fairly progressive country known as Canada. But not all is well, certainly when there are complaints by those individuals who say that they cannot find employment because of the items we have listed. It is simply not good enough to look the other way and give them Bill C-62 and say: "We have dealt with your problems. Let's move on to other ones".

• (1650)

In addressing these concerns, and in trying to articulate those which were made as representations to the committee, we moved amendments to the Bill. We were not attempting to oppose for the sake of opposing. In the process we moved 36 amendments which were intended to strengthen the Bill. They were intended to take what we received from the community and turn it into reality. If they had been accepted by the Government, then the four target groups would be satisfied today, as would the opposition Party, the Liberal Party. Then we would have no problem voting in favour of the legislation and dealing with something else. We would know that we had dealt with the subject in a comprehensive and, most important, fair way. But we have not.

A number of the amendments were crucial to the whole direction and thrust of employment equity. One was to include a provision with respect to an enforcement agency since in the Bill there is no such provision. It was Judge Abella who said that if we cannot enforce rights, then they are just as good as unavailable rights. Those words capture the spirit of what is lacking in this Bill. They crystalize the opposition that we have seen to this piece of legislation and the malaise which is written into every page of it.

The governing Party said: "We have the Human Rights Commission to deal with it somehow". However, at the