

CHAPTER 5

A National Employment Equity Strategy

1. INTRODUCTION

Section 13(1) of the *Employment Equity Act* provides for a “comprehensive review of the provisions and operation” of the Act “including the effect of those provisions”. The Committee has chosen to interpret this section to include a review of measures needed to make employment equity a reality.

In adopting this approach, the Committee acknowledges the valuable contribution of the witnesses who presented their views throughout the course of the hearings. Most of these witnesses did not limit their presentation to the legislation but adopted a broader view of “employment equity” and widened their discussion and recommendations to encompass the context of the Act. They provided the Committee with information on human resource issues, economic questions and labour market or labour force trends and needs.

Some witnesses—people with disabilities in particular—went beyond human resource concerns to place employment equity in its broadest context. They pointed out that achieving equity in employment can mean confronting issues such as disincentives to employment, for example, those taxation or pension plan provisions that discourage people with disabilities from seeking jobs.

2. THE NEED FOR A NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT EQUITY STRATEGY

During the hearings, the Committee frequently heard representatives both from employers’ organizations and from the four designated groups argue that the federal government’s employment equity initiatives are too focused on collecting and analyzing data and do not pay enough attention to programs to remedy disadvantage in the work place. As noted throughout this report, qualitative strategies are required to meet both quantitative and qualitative goals.

Many employers pointed out that they are not turning away qualified members of the designated groups and that in fact, they cannot find enough qualified group members to fill available positions. Witnesses stated that the gap between available skills and job requirements had grown in the general population, but particularly for members of the designated groups. Action, they felt, is urgent in light of the need to adapt to an evolving economy and to remain internationally competitive. Some employers argued that the bottom line goal of profits can be consistent with employment equity principles.

From their own perspective, representatives of the four designated groups echoed this position. Because supportive measures are lacking, members of the designated groups, especially people with disabilities, have not benefited from the provisions of the *Employment Equity Act*. The absence of action to put supportive measures into place at the federal level, they argued, has provided employers with an excuse for not implementing employment equity in the work place.

It seems to the Committee that employment equity is a fundamental human resource tool for the planning, development and management of any productive work force and economy. Both federally and within each business, employment equity should be combined with labour force development