

*Employment Equity*

**Miss Aideen Nicholson (Trinity):** Mr. Speaker, when I was first elected in 1974 I remember speaking in this House on the issue of what was not called pay equity but affirmative action.

**Mr. McDermid:** All you Liberals did was talk.

**Miss Nicholson (Trinity):** At that time I took the view that the Canadian style, which tended to be more of voluntary compliance and good will, really did not call for affirmative action. At that time I thought that as society was changing we would see changes in the employment practices of the public service, and in business. I had hoped that without anybody needing to legislate we would see more women, more visible minorities, more physically challenged people in jobs that they had not traditionally done.

● (1250)

Twelve years later one has to say that the progress has been abysmally slow and, reluctantly, one has come to the point that some legislation is necessary. The Bill before us, in fact, sets very minimal conditions which are not going to be any great hardship on firms that are doing business with the Government. They are only asked to record and report on their progress. At least there is an expectation that firms will question and examine their own progress.

It is disconcerting to find in the Bill that the public service is specifically excluded. That is why I would support the amendment before us which would, in effect, require the public service to meet precisely the same conditions that are being asked of the private sector when doing business with the Government. If the reporting requirement is considered onerous by the Civil Service then, surely, it is even more onerous for the private sector. Equally so, if the reporting requirement is considered a reasonable one for the private sector to meet, then surely it is more than reasonable for the public service to meet.

The advantage of having a legislated reporting requirement is that it is not easy for the Government of the day to change it on whim. When it is there in legislation any change would have to be brought back to Parliament and approved by Members of the House. The people who are in need of, not necessarily special consideration, but equal consideration under the Bill, are listed as women, physically challenged, native peoples, and visible minorities. I want to speak particularly about the physically challenged.

In my own riding I have a residence which has been turned into apartments for physically challenged people. Some of these people are very young and are really fighting against enormously difficult odds. It is typical of their spirit that the words they want to use are physically challenged and not physically handicapped. They want to contribute to society, as everyone else does. If that means making some arrangements to accommodate a wheel chair, to have larger doors, to have wheel chair ramps, surely this is the kind of accommodation that society is more than ready to make so that bright, talented

able people can contribute to society in the same way as those who have been luckier with their physical health.

In the last Government five departments of the public service were asked to undertake special programs by way of employment equity, with the idea that this would spread over to the public service generally. The progress has been abysmally slow. The jobs are still going to able-bodied, and physically handicapped people are still having to tolerate patronizing and inappropriate remarks. The assumption that because of a physical handicap they are not able to meet the requirements of a job is an assumption that is made too often and too lightly. It is very wasteful in our society and we cannot afford it.

For these reasons, although my own taste and talent is always for a negotiated settlement where possible, rather than imposing things by law, I do approve of legislating employment equity in this area. I certainly think the public service should be included in anything that is required of the private sector doing business with the Government. The public sector employment practices set an example for the provinces, for the provincial Civil Service and the federal Civil Service should not be allowed in any way to escape any requirement for creating more opportunities for the less favoured in our society.

**Mr. Howard McCurdy (Windsor—Walkerville):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the occasion to rise in support of Amendment No. 8, which would have the public service included under the purview of Bill C-62. It is rather curious that the public service has been omitted when one considers the debate on the issue of affirmative action qua employment equity. There is no doubt from whom opposition comes. It has come primarily from employers. There have been a number of studies done about employer attitudes, employment arrangements, hiring practices, practices with respect to promotions, attitudes towards minority, women, disabled groups as well as natives, all of which testify to opposition to any strong action taken to ensure that job opportunities would be available to members of the target groups which are covered in this legislation.

The curious thing is that the employers in the public market-place are to be subjected to legislation, however inadequate that legislation may be. The Government finds itself in a very curious situation in which it is clear that, at least in some respects, it is behaving in a way which is consistent with the opposition the private employer has, and expresses; the Government has excluded itself. This is reason for concern, because in 1968 the public service of Canada initiated a voluntary program of affirmative action which was to be directed to visible minority groups. In the interim very little was accomplished, until around 1983 when there was some initiative to begin the process of data gathering for the purpose of permitting an analysis of the distribution of the target groups in the public employ. That report was supposed to have been submitted to the Treasury Board in 1984. By spring of 1985 no evidence that such a submission had been made.