

*Statements by Ministers*

and many members of the target groups are underemployed. This situation well explains and justifies our action.

Employment equity programs do not restrain a company's growth, far from it. Making the most of the available skills and talents is a key to success.

The Employment Equity Act affects some 450 employers and more than 800,000 employees. The employers affected are required to develop and implement a complete employment equity program. In every region of the country, Employment and Immigration Canada has competent consultants who have helped them develop their programs and write the required reports.

We know that it has not been an easy task. Many employers experienced difficulties. But the worst is behind us. This first year will serve as a reference point. We are only beginning. I am sure that next June, employers will be better prepared. In the meantime, employment equity consultants from Employment and Immigration Canada can help them.

In 1986, to complement the Act, the Government created another employment equity program, for federal contracts, to encourage firms doing business with the federal Government to make their staff representative. Companies with at least 100 employees that wish to bid on government contracts for goods and services worth \$200,000 or more must commit themselves to implementing employment equity. Furthermore, this commitment is part of the offer. So far, more than 1,000 firms have made this commitment.

The lack of contract compliance can result in the offer being rejected. In early 1987, as Minister of Supply and Services, I had to use this coercive power. Several companies had been asked to bid on a contract. They all sent their submission without the commitment to employment equity. Therefore, we refused to award this contract.

Employers who are awarded a contract can be audited on their premises by officials from Employment and Immigration Canada. Contractors who do not respect the signed commitment can be denied the opportunity to bid on other contracts. Employment and Immigration Canada consultants are also at their disposal to provide them with the necessary advice and assistance.

Government procurement is thus an important lever in implementing our employment equity policy. Through it, we can extend the principle of fairness defended by this program to areas of activity that it would have been quite impossible for us to reach.

Mr. Speaker, equity in the workplace will not be achieved overnight. It is a slow, sometimes painful process that takes patience and constant cooperation from all concerned. Nevertheless, I am convinced that thanks to the innovative employment equity programs launched by our Government, we will get there.

• (1110)

[English]

**Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East):** Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe that for the second time in two days the Government has come out with a wonderful flowery statement which has absolutely no validity in fact. I refer to the opening of Access Awareness Week yesterday. That from a Government which is building superboxes which are inaccessible to the handicapped. Access Awareness Week was launched by a speech from a municipal politician who told the disabled not to try to integrate their transit system because it would be too expensive and would never happen.

Now we have this wonderful statement on employment equity. Let us look at the reality of the so-called employment equity legislation which was passed by the Government. The legislation has all the power of a water gun. In fact, a water gun is perhaps more powerful than the legislation. It has all the power of an inflated balloon because there is absolutely no enforcement mechanism.

Let us look at what is happening with companies which claim they are responding to Bill C-62. The Maritime Employers' Association, in the name of employment equity, claims that it is following the provisions of Bill C-62. Some longshoremen who have been working in the business for 10, 15, or 20 years are losing their status. Some of them are being forced to take tests, supposedly in the name of employment equity. I do not see that many women working as longshoremen. The employers are actually using this Bill to compromise the employment status of current employees while not responding to the need to integrate women and minorities into the work force.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, the truth is that it is a hard and rocky road. It is also true there have been a number of detours since this Government came to power, and I am referring specifically to the fact that in 1986, for the first time in Canada's history, the wage gap between men and women grew wider. Instead of narrowing because of the Government's efforts, it grew wider!

[English]

In 1986, for the first time since statistics were kept on this issue, the wage gap between men and women in this country became larger on a percentage basis.

The employment equity legislation could have had teeth and force if the Government had accepted the more than three dozen amendments proposed by the Liberal Party to try to give it some enforcement power. In fact, the Government brought in a shallow mechanism which has no substance. Even the Canadian Human Rights Commission, which is not a partisan opposition body, believes that the only way employment equity can really be enforced is if the Canadian Human Rights Act is given the teeth to force employers to pay women the same as men for work of equal value, something which does not exist at the moment.