

Government Orders

Racial harassment in the work place, including racial harassment in government work places, is something we must all be concerned about. There have been allegations made about the National Research Council concerning the fact that people of visible minorities have been openly harassed at work and have also been harassed by not being given fair opportunity to apply for and receive promotions.

As a country we cannot afford this. We must use the talents of everybody to their maximum. Harassment in the work place takes this away and people who have a lot of skills, a lot of knowledge and a lot of expertise are not then contributing.

Racial harassment can take many forms, from open confrontation and open racial slurs to casual derogatory remarks that to the visible minorities are very hurtful but to the rest of us may seem to be rather humorous, or which we think are humorous when they are not.

It is important that these amendments go through because they do a number of things. They ensure that there shall be a commission that is independent and has the ability to report its findings and take corrective measures and that these findings will be reported back to the worker involved.

That is one of the significant things that must happen. In large bureaucracies when there has been an allegation and there has been an investigation the person involved often is told: "That is a personnel matter. That is a matter on which we cannot get back to you and tell you what is taking place". That is simply not acceptable.

It is particularly important when we take a look at some of the new powers that have been given to managers in this scheme. The more discretionary powers we give the more the people who have been harassed become frightened of making a complaint. Therefore, it is more important to build in some type of an independent commission that has these kinds of powers.

Another area we are not very sensitive to is the harassment of disabled people within the work place. People who have disabilities frequently are subject to belittlement, to crude comments or to designs of the work place that are a physical harassment because they

do not allow them to function to their maximum ability within the working community.

We already heard another member talk about harassment of people who are ill. I only wish that this legislation directly applied to Canada Post. It has a horrendous record of harassment of people, particularly people who are ill. I have had a number of complaints in my riding from people who have illnesses, particularly mental health problems, and who have been systematically harassed both at work and at home about their mental illness and have been questioned about it, even with a doctor's certificate. All sorts of snide comments have been made that it is not a real illness but simply malingering, that it is a method of trying to get out of job assignments, and all sorts of things. That constitutes harassment.

Unfortunately, this legislation may not directly apply to Canada Post but it is going to be the model legislation for public corporations, particularly corporations in the federal domain. I would think it would be the model for Crown corporations in the public field, in which Canada Post is certainly a significant and major player.

I support these proposals. We all have to become much more sensitive. We have to build in mechanisms that allow for the independent review of sexual harassment and personal harassment, whether based on racial characteristics, disabilities or other things. There is personal harassment of people because of their clothing styles. It is still quite incomprehensible that in this day and age there are employees being harassed because they choose to dress slightly different than the norm of society.

An hon. member: We cannot even come in here without a tie.

Mr. Karpoff: That is true. People still report to me that they are harassed about the length of their hair. I wish I were in the position to be harassed about the length of my hair but unfortunately I am not. Young people, particularly, tell me that they still receive comments and harassment in the work place from superiors because they wear a hair-style more in keeping with the younger people in this country than with the middle-aged managers in their departments. We have to be much more sensitive about this.