

I would like to thank the House for this opportunity. I would like to thank the members who spoke in favour of the bill. We should keep up the fight to ensure that the justice minister does find the time to change the access to information legislation.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger):** I thank all members for their co-operation.

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired. Pursuant to Standing Order 96, the order is dropped from the Order Paper.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

### EMPLOYMENT EQUITY ACT

The House resumed from October 6 consideration of the motion that Bill C-64, an act respecting employment equity, be read the third time and passed.

**Mr. Jack Frazer (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege this morning to rise to speak to Bill C-64. I will be speaking against the bill.

Bill C-64 extends and supersedes the 1986 Employment Equity Act, which covered crown corporations and federally regulated private sector employees. It covers banks, airlines, railways, and telecommunications, which employ about 5 per cent of Canada's workforce.

According to the government, the purpose is to "achieve equality in the workplace so that no person shall be denied employment opportunities or benefits for reasons unrelated to ability and, in the fulfilment of that goal, to correct the conditions of disadvantage in employment experienced by women, aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities and members of visible minorities by giving effect to the principle that employment equity means more than treating persons in the same way but also requires special measures and accommodation of differences". It is to be reflective of Canada's population as a whole.

While it does not bear directly on the federal scene, it certainly impacts on the bill at hand. I would like to quote from Friday's editorial page of the *Globe and Mail*. It is entitled "Why merit matters", and reads as follows:

### Government Orders

Ontario's new Conservative government has introduced legislation to repeal the one-year-old Employment Equity Act. All Canadians, whatever their status or background, should be glad.

Despite the denials of its supporters, Bill 79 was unquestionably a "quota law". Employers were expected to set targets for creating a workforce that reflected the racial and gender make-up of the community at large. The bill was also clearly discriminatory. By requiring employers to favour members of the designated groups, it effectively required them to discriminate against members of the undesignated group: that is, able-bodied white men.

But these are not the worst aspects of Bill 79. The main evil of the law is its implicit attack on the principle of merit.

Appeals for the importance of merit tend to have an elitist sound to modern ears. In fact, merit has always been cherished most dearly by the disadvantaged, who regard it as a ladder to better things. For generations, even centuries, disadvantaged people have pleaded to be released from the pigeon holes in which others place them and evaluated on their ability as individuals. "See me for who I am, not what I am. Judge me on what I can do, not what I look like".

The supporters of employment equity would throw all this out the window. The merit principle, they will say in their honest moments simply hasn't worked. The disadvantaged are still disadvantaged. The colour blind, gender blind world is an impossible dream. We need to try something else. So instead of disregarding the group identity of people in hiring and promotion, we will fixate on it. Instead of encouraging employers to hire the best person for the job, we will require them to tot up their workers like so many jelly beans. Instead of encouraging new immigrants to become part of the wider society, we will tell them to define themselves by race.

In a diverse society with high levels of immigration, this is a terribly dangerous thing. Designed by well meaning people to encourage integration, employment equity in fact works against it, encouraging Canadians to huddle together in groups and feeding the unhealthy obsession with race and gender that has seized Canadian society in the 1990s. This obsession has already infected universities, museums, writers' organizations and women's groups. Bill 79 would have made it a law. Every Canadian should give it a hearty, "Good riddance".

● (1200)

This does not directly bear on Bill C-64 but I think the same arguments apply against the imposition of Bill C-64. In our case new equity laws will immediately cover approximately 230,000 Treasury Board employees. They will affect all federally regulated businesses and businesses with over 100 employees undertaking federal contracts.

Due to the increased cost this law will cause, it will hold off implementation indefinitely on certain agencies such as CSIS, the RCMP and the armed forces. In practice Bill C-64 means enforcing racial and sex based numerical goals to correct perceived past discrimination. The numerical goals are quotas in disguise. If numerical goals are enforceable they serve exactly the same function as quotas.