

*Supply*

• (1555)

The bill is very clear that it is not about quota. If the Reform Party would only pose this question to the Canadian people, I am sure it would get the right answer.

**Mrs. Hayes:** Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to answer some of the questions.

I actually sat on the committee. I find it interesting the chair of the committee does not deny that 90 per cent of the witnesses supported the legislation and there were others who were asked. Of the 30-some people we suggested 4 came before the committee.

It may indeed have been the case that some could not come or that some cancelled out. We were not informed of that beforehand. The fact the government now indicates that 90 per cent of the committee supported legislation tells me it is using a number not representative of Canadians to support something for its own purposes. I find that objectionable. Those numbers do not reflect Canadian society.

There was a question asked about systemic discrimination. I find the term systemic discrimination quite objectionable. I tried in my speech to express that it is a word that supports the whole notion of employment equity but removes the necessity of proving there was any discrimination in a particular case.

It puts a blanket over a hiring practice. The claim of systemic discrimination allows an employer to discriminate against groups not within the group. It compares employees as a group with society as a group so that in individual cases there is no reality necessary in terms of discrimination. I do not believe discrimination is systemic. If there are individual cases of discrimination they should be brought forward as individual cases, as our motion states.

I did not deny there was merit in the categories included in the legislation. Our party has said that there has to be equality of opportunity. That means addressing education, advertising job positions equally and fairly and access to jobs for all groups designated or non-designated. Those are where government legislation and government initiatives should be taking place, not in determining the result.

As we give people access to these places, the marketplace will reflect the true reality of the Canadian people. That is what is important in the marketplace and for the good of the country.

**Mr. Rey D. Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Fredericton—York—Sunbury.

I am pleased to rise today to address the motion put forward by my hon. colleague from Fraser Valley East. I cannot say I am surprised that the hon. member and his party have chosen to deplore the government's employment equity policy.

From the beginning of the hearings on Bill C-64, an act respecting employment equity, held by the Standing Committee on Human Rights and the Status of Disabled Persons the member and his party have been opposed to the principle and practice of employment equity. They have gone so far as to breach parliamentary tradition by going to the press with complaints about the bill before the beginning of clause by clause study of the bill by the committee.

Ostensibly the Reform Party was desperate to draw attention to its political agenda. Frustrated by the lack of media coverage of the press conference, it became more interested in dilatory tactics than substantive debate during clause by clause study of the bill.

I will now address point by point the motion before us. The Reform Party claims that employment equity is unnecessary. This could only be so if members opposite could show that the Canadian workplace proportionately reflects the demographics of qualified members of designated groups in the Canadian workforce: women, visible minorities, First Nations peoples and persons with disabilities. In fact documents show otherwise.

• (1600)

The Reform Party claims the policy is ineffective. A study done by the Conference Board of Canada on the impact of the existing legislation shows that the major impetus for employment equity initiatives by employers was the passage of the 1986 Employment Equity Act.

The Reform Party claims the policy is unpopular. I counter that witnesses before the committee studying the new employment equity legislation, representing thousands and thousands of Canadians, were nearly unanimous in their praise of the thrust and strength of the legislation.

Moreover, it should be noted that equity in employment is about justice, fairness, human decency and human dignity. Employment equity as a policy and as a law is for all and benefits all Canadians, workers and employers alike.

The Reform Party claims employment equity is intrusive. I would counter that more than 90 per cent of the witnesses that appeared before the committee welcomed the policy, welcomed the legislation and said that it made good business sense.

Employers which appeared as witnesses included the Canadian Bankers' Association, the Canadian Association of Broadcasters, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Manufacturers' Association and many more. Witnesses from labour included the Canadian Labour Congress, the Public Service Alliance, la Confédération des syndicats nationaux among others. Designated groups which appeared as witnesses included Women in Trades and Technology, the Assembly of First Nations, the Council of Canadians with Disabilities and the Canadian Ethnocultural Council among others. These wit-