

program, it makes a great deal of sense that it should apply equally to the public sector and the private sector.

The legislation which the Government has presented is inconsistent to the extent that parts of the public sector are covered while other parts are not. Crown corporations fall within the purview of this legislation, but Government Departments do not. We have, therefore, moved that federal Departments should fall within the purview of this legislation. It is important not only to be consistent in the way in which we treat Crown corporations, private sector corporations, and federal Departments, but also to ensure that the federal government Departments set an example for the private sector. They should be leading the way and demonstrating the effectiveness of an affirmative action program.

Perhaps the Government feels it does not need to do that because there is already an affirmative action program in the public sector. We know that the Government has what it likes to call an affirmative action program in the federal Departments, but we know from its results that the program is ineffective. Taking the Department of Employment and Immigration as an example, while there may be one or two token women in top management positions, the vast majority of the senior civil servants who are running that Department are men. That comes as no surprise. Obviously these men are capable, but it is a sign of the unjust distribution of employment opportunity in the Public Service. It clearly demonstrates that the present affirmative action program is ineffective.

• (1240)

The argument that there is no need to apply the employment equity Bill to federal Departments because we already have an affirmative action program just does not hold water. With Government Departments themselves operating under guidelines it is possible for the Government to change those guidelines willy-nilly. If the affirmative action program were passed by this House into law, then the Government would have to live with those guidelines. Obviously a Government can change legislation. We have democratic processes for that purpose. However, it is much more difficult to change legislation than to change guidelines. Therefore, we recommend through this motion that the employment equity Bill apply to federal Departments.

While we are very skeptical of this legislation and point out its weaknesses, the Government could learn from the experience of applying this legislation to federal Departments. There would be a kind of direct window on affirmative action. Program weaknesses could be seen. Presumably the Government would then be able to change the program in this or that way. It might even come to the conclusion we have already come to from examining experience in other jurisdictions, such as the U.S. and Australia, that it is essential that any employment equity or affirmative action program be enforceable. Government must not only be able to set out the targets, it must also be able to demand that companies or Departments put in place programs to achieve those objectives. That is of

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course lacking in this legislation, and it would be lacking even if the motion we have before the House today were to apply.

If we apply this legislation to Government Departments, that would be a persuasive factor in our dealings with private sector companies. We could say that these are not just rules we are laying on you, we have applied them to the Government as well. The Government would be better able to lean on companies to get their act together on employment equity in the workplace.

In addition, the experience the Government gains from applying this to its own Departments would enable it to distinguish between legitimate concerns raised by private sector companies and those who are simply crying the blues. If a company came to the Government with the argument that it is an impossible burden to achieve the goal of equality between men and women in the workplace, it would know whether it was being faced with a legitimate concern which needed to be dealt with in order to achieve the ultimate objective of equality in the workplace, or whether it was something else.

This is an important motion, Mr. Speaker. If this program is to carry any weight it must be seen as being consistent. It cannot be seen as simply an imposition on the private sector. It must be seen as necessary for the economy, and obviously Government is a large part of the economy. Therefore I call upon the Government to realize the need for consistency, the need to set an example, rather than just laying the burden on the private sector. Doing that will bring closer the day when managers in the Public Service and not just clerks are chosen on the basis of their ability rather than on the basis of their sex or race or handicap.

This motion would add to the effectiveness of the program the Government is planning to put in place, even though I have very serious and fundamental concerns about the program as designed. However, with the passage of this motion the Government would more quickly learn the weaknesses of the program and could therefore improve it more quickly.

Whatever is done regarding affirmative action and equality in the workplace must be done quickly. Women will no longer stand for second place in the workplace. They are second-class citizens no longer. They represent a very powerful and legitimate lobby. The Government needs to respond to that lobby and have federal Departments set the example.

There are a good number of Members across the way who are not only here in their seats but are listening. I can see at least one Member over there who is listening intently. I hope he takes my arguments seriously.

Mr. McDermid: Say something serious.

Mr. Keeper: I hope he will be convinced by these arguments and bring them to the attention of the Minister. If he cannot stand up and refute those arguments, then I hope he will vote with us in favour of this motion so that we are able to bring about justice and equality in the workplace more quickly.