

Employment Equity

Let us now look at Clause 3. Clause 3 is at the beginning of the Bill and shows where the Government began to run into difficulty. First, there is the fact that this legislation will apply only to employers who employ more than 100 employees. Others have already spoken in strong affirmation of the necessity to lower this number. They have referred to the pattern in the United States. They have referred to other sorts of legislation, not specifically dealing with the subject of employment equity, but other labour legislation which provides that employers with far fewer employees be subject to certain types of regulations and legislation.

There may be disagreement about what specific number should be chosen. However, it should be clear that in choosing the number 100 there is a deliberate effort to exclude the vast majority of employers who have any prospect of hiring significant numbers of employees these days. It really is not enough to say to women, members of visible minorities, the disabled and native people: "We will do the best we can, but we are not going to do that with very many employers in so far as benefiting you is concerned". Surely, if the Bill were to go back to committee, common sense would prevail and the number would be lowered to a reasonable one, perhaps to around 15 or 20, which constitutes the number of employees involving the vast majority of employers about whom we should now be concerned.

Perhaps the most unacceptable omission from Clause 3 is the omission with respect to the federal Public Service. Others have spoken about the discrimination involved in which this employer is excluded from the legislation because, of course, it has the power to exclude itself from it. At the same time it demands that other employers adhere to the requirement of the legislation, however inadequate those provisions may be.

If one believes that the federal Public Service has become nirvana for visible minorities, women, native people and the disabled, then one should consider the record. We have already alluded to the sorry record with respect to women when now even more women as compared to a decade ago are in the lower income groups, and even more women are in clerical positions. We have heard about the fact that however few disabled are employed by the federal Government, some 75 per cent of them are on contract and can be dismissed with ease. We are very familiar with the sorry record of the federal Government with respect to the employment of native people, except under circumstances in which the demands are clear and unequivocal. However, we have not heard a great deal about the federal Government's record with respect to visible minorities. I would remind Hon. Members that until a few years ago visible minorities were not even mentioned by the federal Government in any context with respect to affirmative action. The Government is cutting back on the civil service. It is retrenching and getting rid of its employees. What is going on?

The record of the federal Public Service with respect to the visible minorities is well documented in correspondence to the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) from the Caucus for the

Recognition and Improvement of Blacks. This is a group of federal civil servants whose members are from the visible minorities. I remind Hon. Members that on February 27 the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. de Cotret) corresponded with Members of this House, and others, with respect to the record of the federal Government concerning affirmative action. Even then the situation with respect to visible minorities was somehow ignored. Somehow they were forgotten. However, there are ways in which they are not being forgotten, as is documented by the Caucus for the Recognition and Improvement of Blacks. They are now being laid off in far greater numbers and proportion than other employees of the Public Service. We now have a trend which has been noticed in the latest exercise where people have been suddenly dropped in the ratings. This is being disproportionately applied to members of the visible minorities. The author of this correspondence states:

—there is a perception that there has also been a concentrated effort to weed out members of this Black and visible minority group who have been outspoken and articulate in fighting cases of discrimination against them.

I have in my hand page after page of documentation which sets out complaints about the record of the federal Government with respect to the treatment of visible minorities. And yet the Government would exclude the federal Public Service from this legislation.

● (1540)

This Bill should go back to committee so that it can be made into a Bill rather than a bill of goods. This Bill should go back to committee so that it will provide for mandatory affirmative action. Let us stop playing this game in which the Minister smirks, because it is a smirk that can be misunderstood. One may think the Minister is smirking in pride over what has been accomplished through this legislation, but the contrary is true. That smirk indicates the feeling any salesman has when he sells a bill of goods to someone who does not know what he is getting.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Questions or comments? Since there are no questions or comments, we shall resume debate.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg—Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, this could have been an historic day for the House of Commons. It could have been a day on which we would finally deal with a major piece of legislation dealing with the problems of equality for all those who have suffered disadvantage and discrimination. However, it is not. It is a side-track, a slip-stream and an evasion of responsibility.

I do not use those words lightly. Like many Members of Parliament, I have seen over the years a series of efforts designed to make progress in the workplace of Canada, the fundamental basis for economic and social equality. The opportunity for an equal chance in the market-place is the fundamental premise of any efforts to achieve a broader system of equity and fairness.