

*Employment Equity*

and regional diversity, employment equity is part of our heritage, a heritage in which all Canadians must be able to share equal opportunities.

*[Translation]*

The tabling of this Bill in the House today represents the outcome of a useful process whereby facts and information were examined and collected. First of all, we held exhaustive consultations with over 120 groups and agencies across the country; second, all aspects of the Bill were considered in the Legislative Committee, and third, the Bill was debated in the House. The time for talk is over. It is now time to act.

● (1110)

*[English]*

Bill C-62 is the key step in a multi-step operation by the Government to ensure a fully representative workplace. This Bill, as we know, requires federally-regulated businesses to implement and report on employment equity. But it is an overall operation that also includes a federal contractors' policy that ensures that companies doing business with the Government implement employment equity; the inclusion of employment equity measures in the six programs of the Canadian Jobs Strategy; and the Mandatory Employment Equity Program which has been instituted by the Public Service of Canada. Together, these initiatives, including the Bill before us today, are a concrete demonstration of the Government's strong commitment to creating a better and, indeed, more equitable future for all Canadians.

We are not content just to talk. We are committed to action. Bill C-62 is designed to remove discrimination from the workplace, to eliminate obvious cases of discrimination and to root out less obvious cases—systemic discrimination which has unconsciously become all too frequently part of traditional employment practices.

Under Bill C-62, employers must identify barriers to target groups and they must remove them. They must adopt special measures that will involve senior level commitment and management authority. They must begin immediately hiring and training target group members in all levels of the organization, for example, by moving women into occupations from which they had previously been excluded. They must show the progress that they are making.

This legislation will cover federally-regulated companies in such fields as banking, communications and transportation. Because of the initiatives that we are taking with this Bill I am very pleased to report that a number of companies, including those which are beyond the jurisdiction of this Bill, have already come forward with employment equity plans—before this Bill is even passed. I refer to companies such as IBM Canada, Xerox Canada and Ontario Hydro, which have expressed their support and are already implementing employment equity. Many other companies are now working with officials in my Department to implement employment equity. This shows that the idea behind employment equity is

taking hold and that people are realizing that employment equity makes good social sense, as well as making good economic and business sense.

What about the effect of this Bill on members of the target groups? Bill C-62 is a major step forward in creating equal opportunity for women, native people, disabled persons and visible minorities. In fact, the key word that could be used in conjunction with Bill C-62 is "opportunity". This Bill provides an instrument for groups to use in the pursuit of equality. We are not pretending that by merely passing a Bill we have solved the problem. What we are saying is that we have created a new set of conditions—a new environment in which equality will become a reality.

Bill C-62 presents a challenge to women, to native people, to disabled persons and to visible minorities—a challenge which was, perhaps, best expressed by Judge Rosalie Abella in her report when she used these words:

Equality is a process of constant and flexible examination, of vigilant introspection, and of aggressive open-mindedness.

Bill C-62 is enabling legislation, a catalyst for change and progress, not a set of rigid limitations and guidelines. It does not dictate the exact steps that each and every Canadian should take. Instead, it sets forth a framework within which interest groups, employers and Governments can work together to achieve solid social and economic equality. In order to do this, as Judge Abella has said, we must be aggressive, vigilant and open-minded if we are to remove the barriers which currently exist in our society. This is why data and information is so critical to the success of Bill C-62—data and information which will be open to public scrutiny, data and information which we presently do not have. It is impossible to be vigilant, as Judge Abella admonishes us, when employment practices are hidden under layers of legal procedure and bureaucratic building.

We have heard a great deal during the debate on this Bill in committee and in the House from individuals and groups about systemic discrimination, discrimination that is caused not just by individual decisions but discrimination which results from barriers and from blockages that the systems themselves have thrown up—systemic discrimination. In the past, this form of discrimination has been more difficult to deal with, largely because it is hidden. Our goal in this Bill is to remove these obstructions, to open up the processes so that we can all see the exact nature of business practices and so that we can take action where these practices are not satisfactory.

Public disclosure, on which I lay such emphasis, is but one-half of a two-tiered system for enforcing employment equity. Beginning in January of 1987, about eight months from now, employers will be required to establish explicit goals and timetables for accomplishing employment equity. At the end of that year they will be required to report on the progress that they have made toward achieving these goals. These reports will be made public, open to media and public scrutiny—and this is the second half of the two-tiered system for enforcing