

● (1140)

The Bill sets out a very decent and supportable principle. However, it provides no way of ensuring that anyone who has not conformed with that desirable principle within the workplace will do so as a result of this Bill.

Frankly, I believe this is a backward step. Our Party believes, as I think other Parties in the House do, that in the 1980s and the last quarter of the 20th Century employment equity is not only desirable but necessary. If that is the case, we should not pass legislation that simply sets this out as a good principle without requiring that people conform to it. That would be like saying it is our desire that everyone drive on the right side of the road, but if they do not like that, they can drive on the left side. It would be like saying that it is our desire that people ought not to steal, but if they do they should not worry about it. We will be unhappy and monitor the situation in the next five years to see what they are doing. That is wrong.

I know that most Members of the House believe as I do, that there should be fairness, equity and equal opportunity in the workplace to all. Therefore, why do we not say that it is the law of Canada and penalties must be paid if it does not happen? Why does the Government not decide that it is appropriate at this point in time, given the increased knowledge of people about the nature of discrimination, to say that discrimination is not only bad, we will not tolerate it. Why do we not say that discrimination in this country is not only undesirable, it is unacceptable socially because it does not reflect the way we evaluate the worth of individuals here and it will not be tolerated in the workplace?

It should be made clear that we will not allow women to be paid less than men, people with disabilities to be denied job opportunities by virtue of that disability, aboriginal people to be denied fairness and equity in the workplace by virtue of being part of the aboriginal society of Canada, and we will not permit people who can be identified by virtue of colour or background to be discriminated against in Canada. That is what we ought to be saying.

I say to the Minister that the Bill is a sop. It does not reflect the will of the Canadian public. It does not reflect the changes that have taken place in the way society judges discrimination. It does not reflect the changing standards which have been set in the last 20 years.

Let us change this legislation together and mandate that there will be no further discrimination in Canada. Let us make the decision now that we are not simply going to add yet one more voice to the cry from the wilderness that we ought not discriminate against people. Let us make sure it cannot happen because the Parliament of Canada not only wants to see change but demands it.

That is why we have suggested that if the Government refuses to accept that as law, making those who discriminate subject to certain penalties, the Bill could be changed to simply reflect the somewhat frivolous nature of the legislation.

Employment Equity

I believe that most Members of the House, including the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Miss MacDonald), want to see this happen in five years. She wants to be sure that we will not have to go through this exercise again in five years. She wants to be sure that people are not discriminated against. I have heard her say that. Therefore, why not change the Bill in the House to ensure that those who refuse to conform with the will of the Parliament of Canada should have to pay the penalty for non-conformance?

Mr. Mike Cassidy (Ottawa Centre): Mr. Speaker, as you know, the amendment suggests that since the Bill will not achieve equality in the workplace it should state that its purpose is to encourage and promote equality in the workplace. Frankly, I would have worded the amendment differently to say that the real purpose of the Bill is to delay the achievement of equality in the workplace by putting up a smoke screen hiding what the Government is actually doing to further the needs of women, handicapped, native groups and minorities in achieving real equality in the workplace.

As the Treasury Board critic in my Party, I am particularly concerned about what is not being done in the Government of Canada. For instance, this Bill does not apply to the Government of Canada since its provisions do not apply to federal Government departments, but only to employers outside the federal Government. In other words, while the purpose of the Bill may be to achieve equality in the workplace, it does nothing about achieving equality in the federal Government workplace. Therefore, I suppose one must presume that this equality has been achieved. However, I can tell the Minister and my colleagues in the House that that is definitely not the case.

Let me give the case of one of my constituents as an example to demonstrate how far we are from achieving equality in the workplace in the Government of Canada. This constituent is handicapped. She was hired on term some time ago as an affirmative action co-ordinator in her Department. It was her job to seek out ways to implement affirmative action in her Department for people who are disabled or handicapped.

As of the end of March, her term employment came to an end and my constituent was out of a job. In fact, rather than affirmative action, it was affirmative inaction that left her out of a job. She found that in spite of her work in that particular Department she could make no progress at all.

The reason is very clear. It is extremely difficult to implement any kind of affirmative action program in an atmosphere of cut-backs as a result of the Nielsen report and a Government which is determined to cut and slash, regardless of the impact on the services provided to Canadians by federal Government employees. It is extremely difficult to create new positions and ensure that systemic discrimination against handicapped people is eliminated.

Furthermore, there is tremendous pressure within the public service to try to make room for those employees who are being