

Government Orders

Mr. Ian McClelland (Edmonton Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the comments of my colleague opposite regarding the legislation, in particular his comment in our other official language which I thought was very well done. While I appreciated the language I sure have a problem with the content.

It is interesting the minister opposite just finished talking about how the employment equity legislation has fairness as its cornerstone, has no quotas and has to do with providing opportunity, not providing opportunity to people specifically because of their race, their gender or the colour of their skin.

Let me read into the record from the employment equity guide of the Department of Justice some of the non-quota targets. The heading of the chart is "New Employment Equity Targets". They are not quotas. They are targets. The legislation will make these targets into quotas because it has penalties for companies that do not meet the target requirements. Somehow that seems like it could be a quota. As a matter of fact the legislation repealing the Ontario employment equity act of 1993 which the Government of Ontario is using is the job quotas repeal act. It is strange, is it not?

In any event I will quote from the employment equity targets in a Department of Justice document: "Women by occupational category, promotions 93 per cent; aboriginal people, promotions 1.7 per cent; persons with disabilities, 2.8 per cent; and visible minorities, 2.7 per cent".

• (1340)

I will continue: "Recruitment for aboriginal peoples, 2.2 per cent; persons with disabilities, 2 per cent; visible minorities, 4.4 per cent. Recruitment for women, 43.8 per cent; administrative, 39.9 per cent; technical, 49.3 per cent".

I ask the minister opposite whether these numbers that are targets have the force of law behind them and a penalty for non-compliance through the equity police of up to \$50,000 if companies are not in compliance. What are they? Are they quotas or targets? If this is not a quota, what is?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Before giving the floor to the hon. minister I advise the House we have now passed five hours of debate at third reading of the bill. From here forward members will have 10 minutes without questions or comments when we resume debate on the bill.

Mr. Eggleton: Mr. Speaker, numerical targets have long been established as part of employment equity programs. They are not quotas. It is not the same as the American system where they are obligated to try to reach certain numbers. They become goals; they become objectives. However for various reasons they may not be able to be met. If an honest try or an honest effort is made and they cannot be met, there are no fines involved in that.

It is expected that an organization will take a look at its composition to see how it relates to the workforce in general and will take some measures to try to have a balanced workforce. That is what we are trying to do here. We do not have that at the moment.

In terms of aboriginal peoples, people with disabilities and visible minorities, they are under-represented in the federal workforce. They are under-represented in the federally regulated companies that are also part of the legislation. We have greater numbers in the workforce. They are having a hard time getting into the system.

The bill is all about giving them the opportunity to get to the door. On their own merit they still have to make it into the job. None of that has changed in terms of the principle that guides the employment service act of the federal public service.

Targets become a goal and objective. I am sorry the member does not understand that. It has long been established. I can remember when I was mayor of Toronto that we established those kinds of goals. Sometimes we made them and sometimes we did not but there were reasons why we did not. People put out the best effort they possibly could.

Over time we make progress. It will not happen overnight, particularly now that we are into downsizing. It takes more time to reach the goals. It helps us to focus without getting into quotas, without in any way abandoning the merit principle. It does not relate to the province of Ontario legislation which it has now decided for whatever reasons to repeal. This is not the same kind of legislation at all. This clearly upholds the principle of merit.

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it was rather ironic that the President of the Treasury Board would stand to tell us that this is always about merit. When we think back to his nomination we think of the fight he had. He was picked by the Prime Minister to fight the election in his riding rather than having to go through the competition of a real nomination process so that he could demonstrate to his constituents that he deserved their merit by winning the nomination.

I would like to ask a question of the President of the Treasury Board. If he is to try to achieve these quotas or targets that he speaks about—he can choose his word—basically he can influence only two opportunities in the make-up of the federal civil service: first, when people are hired and second, when people are fired. He has no control over those who go of their own volition.

Does the President of the Treasury Board intend to advance the civil service toward achieving the targets he talks about through the early departure incentive program, through the early retirement incentive program, where he will end up with a different ratio or mix in the civil service as we advance toward the numbers and targets he has set out?