

Government Orders

Sometimes qualifications were based on size. Sometimes qualifications were based on saying that women for example could not do certain physical tasks even though it had never been proven. Yet in the last few years in police forces, the armed forces and fire prevention forces women and men have been shown to be equally capable of carrying out the entire multitude of tasks required in those dangerous occupations.

• (1520)

Equity in the workplace means a better workplace. Study after study show that those companies that introduce equity as a fundamental principle in human resource planning become better companies; more productive, more competitive, more efficient, more effective.

I listened with some interest and read in *Hansard* some of the comments from members of the Reform Party about the legislation. I suppose if I were to summarize, and I do it with great hesitation because I do not want to put words in the mouth of the hon. member, but it basically says, let the market decide. Let it choose who it wants to use and what is best for it.

Some progress has been made. Some companies have moved forward and I give them full credit. However I say to members of the Reform Party that more is needed. Where we are now is not enough. I want to quote to members a couple of interesting comments. There are times when they may be tempted not to take my word as gospel, but let me try on them the United Nations report on development.

I quote from this year's report: "The free workings of economic and political processes are unlikely to deliver equality of opportunity". The market can do some things wonderfully well. It can make products, deliver services, make a profit, generate growth and jobs. However it is not very good when it comes to ensuring there is full equality of opportunity for everybody. That is why we have government, to provide a balance and make sure there are some rules, make sure that everybody is treated fairly.

The happy consequence of being a Canadian is that we have always found a nice balance between the public service consideration and the market consideration, that we find a way of working the two in tandem. I believe the legislation in Bill C-64 is a good example of that.

To make the point further, I quote from the Business Council of British Columbia, which is made up of senior business representatives from throughout the province: "Employers alone cannot achieve employment equity. Employers want to be part of the solution in partnership with government, unions, employee representatives, educational institutions and designated group organizations". When speaking, they used a very important word, partnership, a partnership to achieve equality.

If I had to put a label on this bill I would say that is what it is about; partnership to achieve equality in the workplace.

The reality faced by many women, members of visible minority groups, aboriginal peoples, those with disabilities is not the reality of the average white male when it comes to employment and earnings. We have been a privileged group for generations. As a result, other members of society have fallen behind.

Fifty-one per cent of women are employed in sales, clerical work and service positions as compared to 20 per cent of males. Women earn only two-thirds of what men earn, even holding education as a constant.

Everyone in the House, I am sure, was cheered by the recent United Nations development index which put Canada number one in the world on matters of literacy, training and education, investment in people and quality of life. When gender is factored into the equation we fall to number nine. It simply shows that something is wrong. This bill is designed to correct that.

I heard comments in the debate yesterday about visible minorities and that maybe they should not be included. Again, the facts counter that because the visible minority group, which on average has a higher education than the average Canadian, makes close to \$10,000 less. The correlation in that should tell us something. The workplace is not being fair, open and accessible.

• (1525)

We hear every day the eloquent words of the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development of the plight of First Nations people whose levels of unemployment are sometimes 40 per cent, 50 per cent or 60 per cent and whose average income is less than \$10,000, which is one-fourth of what the average Canadian makes.

An article in today's *Globe and Mail* is headlined: "Canadian business chided for ignoring native market". Ms. Pamela Sloan is a principal in the Toronto consulting firm of Hill Sloan, which just published a report on corporate aboriginal relations. The article states that the public and private sectors have made successful attempts but it is not enough. She says to the business community: "You should introduce measures of equity because it makes good business sense to do it".

It was interesting to hear as we have gone through this debate how broadly recognized that fundamental fact is. Canadians have come to understand, whether they are in the public or private sectors, the need to address the systemic exclusion of individuals on the basis of gender, race or physical condition from the opportunities to grow, contribute and develop. They understand that this bill is an attempt to create a more level playing field for all Canadians.