

## Argument Evaluation Contest

\$100 (U.S.) goes to the best critical analysis of the argumentation in the following passage. RULES: (1) The critique should be addressed to a reasonably well-informed, non-specialist, general public. (2) The merits as well as the defects of the argumentation should be discussed. (3) Length must not exceed 1,500 words. (4) The judges will be selected by the editors. Their names will be announced when the winner has been selected. (5) The winning entry will

be published in *INFORMAL LOGIC*. (6) Entries will be blind refereed. Authors must not identify themselves on their entries; only on an accompanying letter giving their name, affiliation if any, and complete mailing address. (7) The judges' decision will be final. (8) We reserve the right not to award the prize if in the opinion of the judges no suitable submissions are received. (9) Entries must be postmarked no later than June 1, 1990.

### Example: Employment Equity in Canada

**Background:** *By the end of 1989, critics alleged that the results of the Canadian government's 1986 employment equity program were abysmal: women, minorities, aboriginal peoples and the disabled had made little progress in entering the labour force. The following argument has been adapted from a presentation in a public debate on the issue.*

Recent statistics suggest that Canadians don't believe in equal opportunity for disabled people. Of the 14 percent of Canadians who are disabled but employable, 50 to 80 percent are unemployed. Most of these have short-term, low-wage jobs. These statistics scare me: because of an auto accident, I am confined to a wheelchair.

Although it is mandatory, the federal employment equity program has no specified benchmarks and it covers less than 5% of the workforce. Most other equity programs around the country are voluntary. What we need is effective, mandatory employment equity legislation. Employers must be forced to hire and promote people regardless of their gender, race or disability, and should have to meet employment targets roughly equal to the percentage of each disadvantaged group in the population. If they don't comply, they should face heavy penalties.

Mandatory programs don't require reverse discrimination. I don't want to be hired just because I'm in a wheelchair, but I don't want to be rejected for that reason either. Such discrimination exists. How else do you explain that a 1982 study showed 97 per cent of able-bodied university graduates were employed, but only 75% of disabled university graduates were employed?

If there isn't explicit discrimination—like the time I was told point blank, "the company doesn't hire the disabled"—then, and more

often, it is unthinking discrimination. If a building has no wheelchair access, I can't even make it to the interview.

Despite the best intentions, voluntary employment equity programs haven't worked. Women, visible minorities, natives and the disabled—the groups supposed to benefit from these programs—have not made appreciable gains. But in the U.S. mandatory programs have made a big difference for women and minorities. So, until attitudes of discrimination against these groups disappear, mandatory employment equity programs will be needed.

It is true, as critics point out, you cannot legislate changes in attitudes. But you can legislate changes in practices, and from experience with non-discriminatory practices, new non-discriminatory attitudes will emerge. For instance, there have been studies which show that employers who have hired one disabled person are more likely to hire others.

Strong employment equity programs will benefit everyone. The disadvantaged will gain self-esteem and economic independence. Employers will gain dedicated employees. Taxpayers will see a reduction in social services costs. Most important, the disadvantaged will gain their right to be recognized as valued members of the society. Remember this: just as I didn't ask to be hit by a drunk driver, it could happen to you. □