

Public Service Staff Relations Act

In order to complete my information to the House, if and when the bill passes, the government will formally ask Mr. Finkelman to conduct this study or examination. For purposes of putting it on the record, I should like to read the draft terms of reference that have been proposed. It is recommended that Jacob Finkelman, Q.C., be authorized:

to examine the Public Service Staff Relations Act and its administration and to make recommendations, having regard to the experience gained since that act came into force, as to how it should be amended or revised in order to meet adequately the needs of the employer and the employees in the Public Service and the employee organizations that represent them, and to serve the interest of the public. An integral part of this review will be a consideration of the administrative framework required for the effective administration of the provisions of the act.

Mr. Tom Bell (Saint John-Lancaster): Mr. Speaker, the House leader (Mr. MacEachen) has asked for speedy approval of this measure. We are in favour of that and the terms of reference seem to be in order. The House Leader spoke of three neutral deputy chairmen. I hope when he uses the word "neutral" that is what he means, and that he would not have in mind the appointment of any more defeated Liberal candidates!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bell: I hesitate to say that because I am one of those who, for many reasons, was not against the appointment of defeated candidates to political posts. I have found that some political candidates, and in nearly every case I would think they were government candidates, who have been appointed to departments have been very co-operative. At least we know them when we call them on the telephone, but I must say I have still to get much satisfaction with the problems I present. At the moment, however, I believe that the public considers we are at the end of the list, and the minister should assure us that we have just about run out of possible Liberal appointments—at least until the next election.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, we are grateful to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) for putting on the record quite clearly the purpose of this bill and we are happy to agree to it. I may say that there have been discussions among us about the bill so that the information the minister has given today is already known to some of us. However, I think it was proper for him to put the full story on the record.

● (1600)

As a matter of fact, I believe a case could be made, even apart from the extra duty to be assigned to Mr. Finkelman, for an increase in the number of persons comprising the Public Service Staff Relations Board, in view of the work load of that board. But the particular reason that prompts the bringing in of this bill, and the request for it to be passed quickly, is a very real and pressing one. As the minister has implied, there has already been regrettable delay in bringing forward amendments to the Public Service Staff Relations Act. We have had the experience of the Bryden study and the Bryden report. There have been a number of things about that which have been unsatisfactory. We were never completely happy with the way the hearings were held. Too much was done in camera, and

[Mr. MacEachen.]

then we had the long struggle in trying to see what was in the report. Added to that is the fact that it is a couple of years old and probably, in view of some of the new thinking which has been evident on the part of the minority government we now have, there might be a disposition to move in a direction different from that which I suspect was proposed in the Bryden report. Therefore, we welcome the suggestion that Mr. Finkelman, whose reputation for impartiality has been so well established, should be given the job of making this study of the operations under the Public Service Staff Relations Act and the operations of the Public Service Staff Relations Board. He will do this, not as an academic outsider, but as one who has been very closely involved. The minister is quite correct in saying that the staff, associations and those concerned all welcome the proposal that Mr. Finkelman make this study and present his recommendations for changes in the act.

It is quite clear that, because of the work load facing the board, if Mr. Finkelman is to do this job he will need to be relieved of some of his duties as chairman. That is the reason for this bill and that, also, is why we are prepared to expedite its passage. As a matter of fact, we do not see why it cannot pass all stages today.

I was glad to hear the suggestion that Mr. Finkelman should be able to make his report not later than the fall. I hope, therefore, that whatever government sits across the way when that time comes, we shall then be dealing with proper and appropriate amendments to the Public Service Staff Relations Act. Not only are we willing to see this bill passed quickly; we welcome it. We have examined it, to make sure that there are no jokers tucked away in it. It seems to me a straightforward, honest piece of drafting and we therefore hope this bill will be passed very quickly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It appears that the House is ready for the question. Pursuant to special order made earlier, the motion is that Bill C-178, to amend the Public Service Staff Relations act, be now read a second time and referred to the Committee of the Whole.

Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and the House went into Committee thereon, Mr. McCleave in the chair.

Clauses 1 to 5 inclusive agreed to.

Title agreed to.

Bill reported.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: When shall the said bill be read the third time?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): By leave, now.

Mr. MacEachen moved that the bill be read the third time and do pass.

Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, since the House is in this mood to do things quickly, would the Minister of Veterans Affairs like to bring forward his bill to amend the Pension Act.

Mr. MacDonald (Cardigan): I should love to, Mr. Speaker.