

Public Service Collective Bargaining

Mr. Benson: That should be left to the various parties in the house when they get together to consider this matter. They should decide whether the employees should be told: "We want to proceed with this matter; would you get together and select representatives to meet with us?" As a representative of the government I should not make this kind of decision. These employees are not government employees; they are House of Commons employees. Any decision about their future must be made by the House of Commons.

• (5:00 p.m.)

Mr. Knowles: We shall accept that proposition as a fair statement of the situation provided the minister understands that we do not want this matter left on the shelf indefinitely, to use the words of my hon. friend from York South.

This is the kind of thing which could be put off from one session to another. We could easily be told six months from now that it would be better to wait until more experience had been gained in the operation of the new public service legislation. Perhaps I should warn the minister that if he fails to act on this matter he will be pressed to do so on the floor of the house. We should extend to our employees the same rights as we are extending to public servants generally, and I hope these consultations will begin to take place very soon.

Mr. Benson: I certainly do not wish that there should be any undue delay in this regard. I have learned from my experience with hon. members opposite to avoid saying that something will be done by a specific date, because it may prove impossible to do it by that date. But the hon. member knows from his experience of my conduct that I never put anything off for a long period.

Mr. Bell (Carleton): I will simply say that unless the minister does act with the promptitude he has indicated he can expect harassment from this side of the house.

Clause agreed to.

Title agreed to.

Bill reported.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rinfret): When shall the bill be read the third time?

Some hon. Members: By leave, now.

Mr. Benson moved the third reading of the bill.

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

[Mr. Knowles.]

PUBLIC SERVICE

LEGISLATION RESPECTING EMPLOYMENT IN GOVERNMENT SERVICE

The house in committee on Bill No. C-181, respecting employment in the public service of Canada—Mr. Pearson—Mr. Rinfret in the chair.

The Deputy Chairman: May I draw to the attention of the committee the fact that several amendments were made when this bill was considered by the joint committee on employer-employee relations in the public service of Canada and a reprint of the bill was ordered.

On clause 2—*Definitions.*

Mr. Benson: I should like to say a few words at this time on Bill C-181, the proposed Public Service Employment Act which is to replace the present Civil Service Act. Specifically, I should like to recapitulate the major objectives that this statute is to serve.

The first objective is the reaffirmation of the merit principle as embodied in previous civil service legislation. The application of this principle to appointments and promotions in the civil service has been the practice in this country for nearly 50 years and it is the government's conviction that this practice must endure. In this we have the unanimous support of the special joint committee on employer-employee relations which inquired into the bill, and also the support of all staff associations of the public service.

Bill C-181 extends the application of the merit principle to certain groups of employees who had remained exempt from the provisions of the Civil Service Act of 1961. The proven philosophy of appointment and promotion on the basis of merit is the core of the proposed statute. The security of this policy is again assured by stating explicitly the authority of the commission for all appointments to as well as from within the public service.

Another objective of Bill C-181 is to provide the public service of Canada with as effective and efficient a staffing agency as is required to meet the needs of departments for competent personnel in a labour market characterized by intense competition and increasing specialization over the years. The Civil Service Commission has done an excellent job; it has served Canada well through the continuous application of the highest standards to the business of staffing the public service of Canada, a public service which