

*Government Orders*

30 years? The answer is yes. That is pure motherhood. Nobody on either side of the House argues that issue, that there is need for some updating of the mandate under which the Public Service operates. That is not at issue at all. It is characteristic of the way this government operates.

For example, when it was going to bring in the goods and services tax, it couched it in terms of replacing an admittedly bad manufacturers' tax. It gave the undertaking at that time that it would be revenue neutral. Therefore, all across this country, people in this House and elsewhere said: "Well, you cannot argue with that. That is pure motherhood. They are going to get rid of a bad tax and they are going to bring in a good tax in its place and they are not going to collect any more money". Well, you could not be against that or you would not be normal, would you? That is motherhood.

What went wrong along the way? What always goes wrong with this government? It says one thing and proceeds to do the exact opposite.

Take the free trade issue as a second example. There it came with the motherhood approach. "Canadians, would you like to trade more freely with your friends the Americans?" Well, the answer to that question is yes, because we have been trading about 85 per cent of our commodities for many, many years without a free trade agreement. Who could be against more trade which means more jobs and so on? That is the way it was put to us. Of course that is not what came out the other end of the pipe. It knew from the beginning that it was about to sell the shop.

I give those two examples in terms of tax and in terms of free trade where the government said one thing and did something very different.

There are many other examples, but in terms of my debate this afternoon, since I only have a few minutes, the third example in tandem with the tax issue which I have mentioned and the free trade issue is this particular bill, the so-called Public Service Reform Act.

The rhetoric on this says that everything is going to be sweetness and light if we could only get this bill through. That is what the President of the Treasury Board said a few minutes ago. They say that their goal is to eliminate a good part of internal red tape. Who could be against that, if that is what they are going to do?

Let us look at what the court said they are doing, because the court, fortunately, thanks to the union, has had an opportunity to have a look at the government's nicely stated objectives. Here is what the court had to say fairly recently, indeed within the last 12 days or so. On January 30, the Federal Court said that this proposal "departs substantially from the merit principle". Anybody who did not have a brass face, who did not have an absolutely brazen face would have withdrawn the bill as soon as the court said that and would have said: "Court, you are right. Court, we respect your finding", and they would have gone back to the drawing board.

This government has had many opportunities to do the right thing here. It has had lots of advice to do the right thing. The public accounts committee, an all-party committee of this House, told it last spring. Before proceeding with the idea of reforming the Public Service in such a massive way, however well intentioned that reform may be, the public accounts committee said: "Before you do that, before you take on this massive reorganization and restructuring of the Public Service, why do you not have a special committee of the House?"

Is this such a far-fetched idea, coming as it does from members of all parties, including Conservatives, who sit on that public accounts committee?

As if that were not enough, along comes the Federal Court in the last couple of weeks and tells the government that its proposal "departs substantially from the merit principle". The judge who made the ruling did not stop there. He went on to say: "It would be defeating the whole purpose of the Public Service Employment Act which is to ensure that appointments to the Public Service are made on the basis of merit".

Particularly since 1919 with the establishment of a Public Service Commission, over the last 73 years we happened to have in this country—and it is no accident—one of the best public services in the world. Why fix it if it is not broke? If we have a system that has served us so well, why tamper with it?

We only have to see how this government operates to see why. It is never comfortable with anything it cannot control. That is why it has taken offices that over the years have been above the fray like the secretaryship of the Privy Council, the most senior public servant, and it has made an effort to politicize the holder of that office. We have seen people like Paul Tellier, Derek Burney and