

Private Members' Business

If anybody deserves priority over others to be put into a vacant position in the Public Service, it is somebody who has shown that kind of loyalty over decades, not someone who has come to work in the excitement and the political environment of Parliament Hill. They often come here as a political friend of a member and have not, with all respect, demonstrated the long-term commitment of many people who are now losing their jobs.

The government likes to say about people who lose their jobs that everybody has been accommodated and that mostly it has been through attrition. That is not the case at all. There are well over 20,000 people who have been disrupted, dislocated from their jobs, forced to accept a lesser job at a lesser salary, or left without a job. This is at a time when they are still paying a mortgage and they have two or three children in university. Their opportunities for re-employment are very slim, simply because of their age and their level of experience which makes them a more expensive person to employ for any other firm or for any Crown corporation, for that matter.

In light of all that, a bill that gives priority to our staff over all others is badly timed, to say the least, and is probably inappropriate at any time. We would be prepared to look at other options for providing some measure of security to parliamentary staff working in members' offices but not to disrupt career public servants, many of whom are now without a job, to accommodate our own staff.

• (1330)

Mr. Neil Young (Beaches—Woodbine): Mr. Speaker, I have spoken on the bill, obviously, since it is my bill and I introduced it. I also encouraged another colleague of mine to move an amendment to the bill which would refer the subject matter to a committee. The reason I did this was for many of the reasons put forward by the previous speaker.

When this bill was first debated in 1984, it was introduced by a then Liberal member of Parliament who also happened to be the parliamentary secretary to a minister. The government at that time was not adverse to doing something about employees of members of Parliament.

Contrary to what the hon. member says, all people who work for members of Parliament are not necessarily political friends of the MP. I never met the people who

work in my office before I hired them. If you take a look at the people on the Hill, there are many who have worked for many different members of Parliament for many, many years.

The question I want to address, in just a minute or two, is the very one that the previous speaker addressed. Everyone recognizes that staff who work for members of Parliament have absolutely no rights at all. They do not have the same rights as any other employee in this country, and that is to join a union of their choice. There is no legislation to prevent them from doing that, and that is not what the bill argues. But what I would argue is that members of Parliament who have participated in this debate have all expressed a view that they are sympathetic to the position in which staff of members of Parliament very often find themselves.

What I am saying is that the House should do with this bill what it agreed to do in 1984, that is, refer the subject matter to a committee to allow members of Parliament to have a fuller discussion on the merits of the problem. It would allow staff members of MPs to have a say and to express their concerns and it would allow any pertinent union to come before a committee to look at the matter.

The principle we are trying to address concerns the rights of staff who happen to work for a member of Parliament. They should have the same rights as every other Canadian employee; that is, the right to have some say about the working conditions while they are on the Hill working for an MP. That right should be recognized by members of Parliament, and Parliament should accord to those employees the same rights as every other Canadian who works off the Hill. I do not think that is unreasonable or too much to demand. I only find it regrettable that one or two members in the House during this debate tried to raise the issue as a partisan political question. I can quote the hon. member who spoke before me in *The Hill Times*.

I find it strange that I have never, as long as I have been in this House, found a Private Members' Bill attacked in such a way that even the motivation of the hon. member who put forward the Private Members' Bill has been questioned in the way in which it has been. I find that regrettable and I do not think it adds to either this debate or to the relationships between MPs in this House.