

Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act

years here, all the services Members enjoy today did not exist. Members did not have large offices with research and support staff. The place did not work that way. There were no word processors or other sophisticated equipment.

I recall when a Member of Parliament had in his or her office—mostly his because there were very few women Members at the time—only one secretary in one small room. That had only occurred shortly before I came to Parliament Hill as an employee. I am told that before that, there were two Members and two secretaries to one room and before that, I understand that there were two Members and only one secretary and that the one secretary worked for the two Members simultaneously.

All of this is to say that the size of the staff on the Hill has increased. In the 1970s, because there had been this massive increase in staff, there was a restructuring of the administration here on the Hill. This restructuring was supposed to make the place better. Of course, if one were to ask the opinion of most people who work here, one would find that their opinion is slightly different. The word "better" is not the one that most employees would use to describe working conditions and how this place has operated since the restructuring of the administration of the House of Commons.

Perhaps some restructuring was necessary. There is no such thing as an administration that does not need to be improved upon just like there is no such thing as collective bargaining rights that do not need to be enhanced. Everything should be better than it is and it is our role as Members of Parliament to make sure that general conditions for everyone improve.

At the time we sought to improve the administrative structure of the House of Commons, it is my view that there should have been a parallel movement to improve the methods by which the staff could collectively air grievances with the new bureaucracy created at the top level here at the House of Commons.

[Translation]

And the Hon. Member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow) was saying earlier that under the Liberal administration, perhaps 10, 15, 20 years ago, jobless people were seen to turn to their Members of Parliament to try and get a job on Parliament Hill.

I am considering this, Mr. Speaker, and I still wonder what can be wrong with that. Is there anything wrong about contacting one's Member of Parliament and trying to find a job here, either on Parliament Hill or elsewhere?

It is a fact that on Parliament Hill in those days before the new management was set up, there was indeed very little structure. How was the staff hired? I remember, Mr. Speaker, that it was not unusual in some services, especially two of them, for the managers to seek the advice of Members about suitable people to fill some positions. Then there was no process. And the local Members from all political parties, I think were doing what they could to find jobs for their constituents. It may not have been the best procedure, but it

was the only structure in place and Members were trying to find jobs for their constituents.

However, today, Mr. Speaker, we have the management structures to which I referred earlier. But I feel that a serious mistake was made when no process was provided to allow the employees to state their grievances to the new parliamentary management.

In short, I wanted to say that it would have been essential beginning in the mid-seventies, about 1975-76, to consider implementing some legislation allowing the staff of the House to become unionized. The previous Government made such an attempt. However, Mr. Speaker, we are sitting in this House during this Parliament and not in the previous one.

• (2110)

[English]

We are not here only to reminisce about things which some of us think some of us should have done some time ago. Our task as Members of Parliament is to attempt to improve the rights and privileges of all Canadians, to try to make a better life for all. The ideal place to show an example for the entire country is right here in this place. It is here that we should demonstrate to all Canadians that we are able to improve their collective lot. We should demonstrate that by showing good faith. In any case, the people of Canada should be able to measure how well we do by the way in which we treat employees on Parliament Hill.

If we in the House are unable to improve the working conditions of 3,000 or so employees who work within the precincts of Parliament Hill, what qualifies us to pretend that we are able to improve the collective life of everyone else in Canada? Surely this place should be a model for all employers. Surely employers should be able to look at this place to see an example of where employees are treated in a just, fair, and equitable way. That is not the case today. However, it is my hope that this legislation, as incomplete as it is, will at least be a start toward improving the rights of employees of the House of Commons.

Mr. Forrestall: Why did you oppose me when I did it 15 years ago?

Mr. Boudria: I hear the very interesting remarks of the Hon. Member across the way. I remember well his remarks some 15 years ago, from my working station in the House of Commons. I forget just what I was doing in 1971, but I think I was a pack boy in the stationery store in the West Block. I used every influence I had as a pack boy to change the legislation and to get improvements! That duty should rest on Members of the House, not on people who were not here at any given time in the past. Our duty is to improve those rights here, now, and today.

I call upon all Members of Parliament to do their best, not just in passing this Bill because it is not complete enough, but in starting to think about more complete legislation to give full