

Motions

If one is hiring or promoting it is possible to ask, "Out of a field of 100 or 10 or 5 people, which one or two are the best employees for a particular job". In other words, it is fairly easy to make a judgment call as to which one is the best. The differences between the employee who is hired and the two or three who are not, however, are often infinitesimal. In the end, it is a judgment call. One is almost flipping a coin. Anyone who has hired knows, as I do, that one often cannot say for sure that one's judgment is right. One must simply make the best judgment one can in terms of deciding who to hire and who not to hire.

However, when it comes to firing, one is making a decision which is much more crucial to the well-being, both economic and social, of the individual employee than when one comes to hiring. If one does not hire John Doe or Mary Smith for one job, then perhaps he or she has a chance at another one; if it concerns an internal situation then at least they have jobs already. If one fires John Doe or Mary Smith, however, he or she is out on the street, and it is a difficult job market. Here in the national capital, for example, we have an unemployment rate reaching 9 per cent. Federal employees in Montreal are facing a situation where the labour market is very clogged and the unemployment rate is over 10 per cent. These circumstances prevail in many parts of the country despite some general improvement in the employment situation in the last 10 or 12 months.

If one is down to deciding which 15 of 30 employees should be dumped, the differences between employee 15 who goes and employee 14 who stays are, in fact, impossible to discern. It is a totally arbitrary decision. I suggest that that would also be the case with employee 20 and employee 10. One might be able to determine which employee is the worst or next to worst and which employee is the best or the next to best. However, in between, it is much more difficult.

I therefore believe that if firings must take place, they should take place on the basis of seniority. That is the principle accepted in the private sector where a union contract prevails and where lay-offs occur. Perhaps there should be a formula brought forward which places the major emphasis on seniority, or perhaps one which only excludes, from determination by seniority, employees who have consistently shown a very marginal work performance as shown by a series of very negative performance reviews over the two or three years prior to the cuts being made. In other words, apart from those employees who are demonstrably very marginal, I believe that seniority should be the criterion which applies.

One might also, exempt from the cuts employees who have demonstrated outstanding performance. Again, maybe 5 per cent or 10 per cent of the employees in a particular branch or division might have demonstrated outstanding performance and have earned their right to stay even if they would not be able to stay by means of seniority. However, for the most part, one is dealing with employees who are equivalent, relatively speaking, within the Government of Canada, as anywhere else. One person may have better education but may not be quite

such a good performer. Another employee may not be as brilliant but is there every morning at nine o'clock, not punching the clock at 5 p.m. but, rather, sticking around to see if there is work to be done. Such employees are steady, reliable, get the work done, and serve the Department or agency faithfully and loyally, through thick and thin, through long periods of time.

How does one make judgment calls about those kinds of things? It is very difficult and that is why seniority becomes a principle which is at least acceptable and can be understood by people. One might ask, "Why should I go while she stays?" and come to the conclusion, "Well, I guess it is because she joined the Department a week before I did. I guess I should not have taken a holiday before I began working with my Department". But at least such employees understand that the decision was made on a non-discriminatory principle.

I am making those representations because the committee has recommended that the guidelines be issued to the department and that they be enforced. Let us get to that. I say to the Public Service Commission through *Hansard* that by September there should be an indication as to what further steps have been taken to publicize its guidelines, and whether it has by then reviewed its guidelines to make them more effective.

I want to make a final point on this report. Your Honour might indicate how much time remains to me. I believe it to be about three or four minutes.

Mr. Speaker: Three minutes.

Mr. Cassidy: The point is that I think there is a serious problem concerning the accountability of the Public Service Commission to the Parliament of Canada. Perhaps I can in fact address these remarks to Your Honour because of your responsibility for this place. The commission is an agency of Parliament. The appointments are made by Order in Council. Unfortunately, the new provisions ensuring that Parliament can review the appointments effectively will amount to a dead letter for some time because the three existing commissioners, all of whom have 10-year terms, have only been appointed in the last two or three years. Two of them were appointed in the last six to eight months.

• (1320)

The mechanism for that accountability, however, has never been thought through and has never been adequately developed. The commission works in close conjunction with the Treasury Board to the point where the functions are almost indistinguishable. Therefore, employees of the commission may tend to assume, naturally, that they form just another government department.

The commissioners appear before the Government Operations Committee once a year to defend their Estimates. This year they appeared before the committee for between an hour and a half and three hours—a short period of time. There is no