

Government Orders

the normal benefits under the act. That should not be the case either.

Clause 18 of the bill states that a deputy head of a department may decide on his or her own that an employee has abandoned his or her post and therefore is no longer employed. Previously when that determination was made the Public Service Commission had to hear evidence and make a finding. That is no longer the case. In other words, dismissals can happen if an employee is away for a period of time. The head of the department can decide that the employee has abandoned his or her post and dismiss that person. There is no apparent dealings with the Public Service Commission in respect of that. Again the government is proposing unfairness, high-handedness and improper rules.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, and I see my time is about to expire, in clause 19 the government has provided that increased contracting out can take place notwithstanding a decision of the Federal Court of Canada which said that contracting out would not result in the discontinuance of a function. The government is now saying it is. It is circumventing the decisions of the court that were placed there in order to safeguard employees in the Public Service.

This bill is bad. The minister should withdraw it at once.

Hon. Bob Kaplan (York Centre): Mr. Speaker, like all my colleagues on this side of the House, I want to speak against this bill and indicate, as others have done, that the Liberal Party opposes it. It has the usual fancy and provocative and apparently substantial title, PS 2000, but on examination we find that it is an unacceptable bill.

The government has departed from a long tradition of moving forward changes in the law affecting the Public Service by some measure of consensus, some types of parliamentary hearings, and has failed. We recommend in this case that it return to that procedure and that a special committee of Parliament be established to consider the principle of the bill, as well as its substance in the total context of the so-called PS 2000 program.

If such a project were undertaken by the government it would be following the recommendation of the public

accounts committee which was a recommendation made by the committee including its own members.

We want to indicate that we support the clauses of the bill that contribute to strengthening the Public Service and its ability to serve the public and improve labour relations. I was proud to see that my colleague, the member for Kingston and the Islands, emphasized this particularly in his closing remarks. We oppose the clauses of the bill which undermine the merit principle. He explained in some detail how this principle was undermined without adequate safeguards that destabilized the Public Service and discouraged the hiring and retention of highly qualified individuals. We also oppose the clauses of the bill that reduce accountability. We have substantial amendments to propose to the bill which we will do at the right time.

• (1530)

There are many problems in this country and so many of the causes can be put down to simple mismanagement by this government. In one file after the other, government mismanagement has taken a country with so much going for it, with such a determination to stay together, and virtually brought it to the verge of destruction.

This government's mismanagement of the Public Service has caused the first ever massive walkout of public servants in the history of Canada. It has brought the morale of the Public Service to an all time low.

The harsh and arbitrary treatment is causing a loss of competent people. The management of its own employees is incompetent in a time of change. If it cannot manage the Public Service we should not be surprised to see that the larger issues—the constitutional issue, the tax issue, the federal-provincial relations issue the survival of the health care of Canada issue or the university issue —are mismanaged.

It has asked the Public Service to do more with less but now the message is clear, to do less with less, and the Canadian public is suffering as a result.

We not only encourage the government to abandon this procedure and establish an all-party committee to examine the reform of the Public Service, but we also ask it to listen to members of the opposition and to public servants themselves on the reform of the Public Service.