

Public Service

But I think we have to go deeper than that. Today is a good day to debate whether or not there are distinct differences between those who are elected to make policy for the people on behalf of the people, and those who are elected to deliver those policies to the people. As I mentioned, there is a confidence factor from the point of view of us, as politicians, being able to depend on that advice, or at least having the perception that we depend on that advice. We should not have a knowledge that the advice may be biased or less than objective because of political persuasion. We have to depend on the public servants and we should not ask questions about their loyalty for one political party or another. Their careers could be in jeopardy as well.

● (1650)

My own example is a case in point. My career as a public servant would have been seriously jeopardized had I remained there or returned to it. I think all members can ask the question: if we were defeated in the next election would we feel comfortable going to work for the public service? There is a curious anomaly concerning the Public Service Employment Act. This question was raised with Mr. Gallant when I was applying for my leave of absence. This anomaly is that when applying for a position in the public service, the Public Service Commission cannot look behind your current application for previous political activities or affiliations. Political affiliation cannot be taken into consideration when a public servant is hired. This means that I could have left my position at Consumer and Corporate Affairs, resigned—as I did—and if I had been defeated I could have gone back to the Public Service Commission to apply for my old job, and they could not consider the fact that I had run in an election.

Mr. Benjamin: That is the way it should be.

Mr. Evans: I agree with the hon. member. However, that raises a similar problem. I would have been in exactly the same position, sitting beside the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Ouellet) in a cabinet committee meeting. In that case, had the member I ran against been elected, he would be sitting across the table from me. Therefore, there are some great anomalies.

Another question, apart from our confidence in public servants who act as politicians, concerns the confidence which the public has when they talk to a public servant that they will be treated with total impartiality and will receive good service, irrespective of what political stripe they may be. There should be no question in the mind of some, when talking to a public servant that if he is recognized to be of a different political stripe he will not get good or fast service. Instances of someone who knows a public servant and has fought with him on different sides in an election campaign, and therefore does not expect to have his problem dealt with quickly is just an example of some of the problems encountered.

The hon. member for Regina West should take note because there are other dangers as well which could result from overt political activity in the public service.

One of those problems is and will be experienced in Saskatchewan. With Saskatchewan's wide open public service it has been known that many of the public servants who worked in the Blakeney government have had strong political affiliations. Now that there is a Conservative government there, how confident is that Conservative premier and his government, which was overwhelmingly elected by the people, going to be in the advice they get from the public servants?

I suggest that we should examine very carefully that very situation over the next several months because if, as I suspect may be the case, the premier of Saskatchewan says that he is not confident that he is receiving the best advice, he may simply fire a large number of public servants through some means. We will then have seen an example of a situation which is totally contrary to the parliamentary traditions of this country and of the mother Parliament where public servants are impartial and not replaced when governments change. We can see the beginning of the over-all change in the nature of the public service. When these hearings, which I believe should be called, are held I suggest that some public servants be summoned to talk about that situation. They should be asked how they perceive their political activities and whether those activities will be potentially difficult for them. They have a right to have an opinion on what the rules will be. As well, we have a right to look into that situation. Therefore, I suggest that this matter be examined before the appropriate committee because it is a matter of great concern to my constituents in Ottawa Centre.

I think that I have perhaps played the devil's advocate today in reviewing what is perhaps the downside of political activity. However, my constituents have indicated that they would like more political freedom to put signs on their lawns, for instance, something with which I do not see any great difficulty. People do that anyway. If a man who works in the public service displays a political sign he simply says that it belongs to his wife, or vice versa. If they both work in the public service they just say that the sign belongs to their son or daughter. This is an example of some of the archaic rules which exist in the Public Service Employment Act, which I do not believe have any major application.

However, there are some fundamental questions that politicians, and public servants who advise us, must deal with together in order to establish a fair set of rules which will allow the type of political activity that our constituents want. At the same time we should not put our public servants in a position where they will be victims of changes of a political party at the government level. This is an important consideration because the public service is an important part of our working environment in Canada. They are dedicated people who work long hours and have long careers. I believe we must take that into consideration as well.

Mr. Benjamin: Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member permit a question?