

*Motions*

well-developed procedure by which staffing action is undertaken if that person is passed over. There is a staffing board, a group of people including some from outside the department, who interview the applicants on the short list of those who are not cut from the written applications. They determine which are the best applicants for a particular position. Furthermore, the staffing actions are subject to review by the Public Service Commission and about 10 per cent of staffing actions within the Public Service are appealed. Perhaps 10 per cent of the appeals that go to the Public Service Commission are accepted, which amounts to a very small proportion—perhaps 1 per cent—of staffing actions being subject to some change because of intervention by the Public Service Commission. This is a very valuable form of quality control in ensuring that the merit principle is being enforced as best as possible.

However, there are no such series of checks and balances with respect to the reverse order of merit. A manager can decide, perhaps very quickly, what the order of merit shall be and employees may find themselves dumped because they have been judged to be of lower merit. They are in a very difficult position because it is very hard to grieve. There is no established appeal process, nor has one been set up.

I hope the Public Service Commission will consider this matter which I have already spoken about to some extent during my remarks when the commission's estimates came before the Government Operations Committee some time late in the month of May.

● (1310)

In early 1986, or maybe late 1985, in response to representations that I and others made, the commission stated that it would issue guidelines to Departments in terms of giving them a directive as to how the reverse order of merit should apply. It was curious to me that those guidelines were not in fact developed until mid-May, a week or two before the commission went before a parliamentary committee to have its estimates considered. I do not have the guidelines in front of me because I did not expect this debate today but, while they have been communicated to Departments, they have been done in a way which does not indicate that the commission attaches any particular priority to this area. They have been done weakly, they have been done limply, and the message that goes out, in my opinion, is that the Public Service Commission does not really care about this question. It is just doing it because it was forced to do so by the Public Accounts Committee and pressure coming from Members like myself and the Hon. Member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell (Mr. Boudria).

The Public Service of Canada has grown pretty much steadily since the Second World War, up until the last few months. There have been one or two instances in which certain functions involving certain agencies have been cut back, but in general that has been within the context of a growing Public Service. This has meant that even people affected by reorganization in their particular Department, or by the elimination of a particular branch or agency, could fairly easily have a

chance at finding employment elsewhere in the Government of Canada. A good example involves the actions of the former Government in chopping the secretariats for social and economic development. Very quickly, over the course of the few months of the Turner Government, the employees who were affected were found other positions, and very few of them had to go on to the workforce adjustment surplus list in order to survive. Now we are in a cut-back mold; we have many more cut-backs. It seems to me, if a well developed procedure exists for hiring and promoting people which protects the rights of public servants, that that should be the case as well when it comes to these cut-backs, but that is not yet the case. It is not good enough, in my opinion, to just send a message or a memorandum out to personnel directors in the Departments and say, "Will you please get it through to your people in whatever way you can?"

I recall, on a different issue, that the Public Service Commission was avid in its efforts to ensure that everyone knew what was the new policy. That was when it brought forward directives or guidelines in February of 1984 relative to political rights. There was a special issue of "Dialogue Express", which went to all of the Public Service; it was widely distributed to almost every employee's desk, so that they would know what the situation was.

Now, any employee can be affected by cut-backs, by a reverse order of merit ruling. Therefore, I believe that the information now developed by the commission should in fact by now be distributed to every employee. It should be widely distributed through the unions. There should be ample consultation with the unions to ensure that employees who are affected know the rules.

If I recall correctly, the rules themselves leave much to be desired. This should in fact be improved and tightened up to ensure that there is a process for appeal, so that something that has been put into employees' files some long time ago is not now used to kind of blackball them and put them low down on the order of merit.

Some guidance should be given to Departments as to whether academic qualifications, work experience, the level of performance on the job or years of experience should be the major factors in determining merit, if the system is to be used. It is my opinion, and I think that the unions representing employees and the government service would very strongly agree, that the Government is wrong to try to take something which can be and should be applied to hiring and use it for firing, as well. When one applies reverse order of merit, too often it leads to favouritism. Too often it leads to a situation where a manager decides that he or she will "get" certain employees who, for some reason, because of chemistry, or personality, do not get along particularly well with that certain manager. Therefore, the victim is someone who stands out, someone who has an unusual working style or who has perhaps shown up the boss because of being brighter or a bit more aggressive. All of these things will occur unless there is some kind of better protection for the employees.