

Employment in Public Service

their participation in political activities, although this is not applicable in the case of their other friends in the profession. I think there is a distinction to be drawn between a person acting directly in a sense, as an agent of the government administering government policies, and a person in a similar professional field which normally is not considered to be excluded.

Whether or not the minister is prepared to accept the amendment moved by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, I think we should at least give some of these things an airing in the house so that we might have an understanding in the house and in the country as to what the situation actually is in matters of this kind. I do not feel that the minister has clarified the situation by the rather abstruse reference to a parallel between the theoretical right to strike and a theoretical lack of any prohibition against membership in political parties, where one would normally expect a person to have that right. I believe it is something similar to the feeling one finds in industry, where there are certain employees of corporations who, because of the nature of their relationship to the corporation and its management, are not expected to be members of the union. The minister may not have knowledge of the sort of thing I am talking about but I find it difficult to imagine that he has not come up against this attitude and understanding.

Mr. Bell (Carleton): Mr. Chairman, may I ask the minister, if he is correct in his statement that there is now no prohibition against membership in a political party, why he objects to there being included in the bill simply a confirmation of what he says is the status quo.

Mr. Benson: I object to its being in the bill because when this bill went to the committee I said I would accept the recommendations which came back from that committee. The committee held extensive hearings and had extensive discussion on this particular matter. Their recommendation has come back and I accept their recommendation.

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Chairman, those are noble sentiments the minister has just expressed, but of course he realizes this is one of the very few issues on which in the committee there was a division. Most of what came back from the committee in these three bills was unanimous. On this point, however, it is difficult to say that there was a consensus, in view of the vote.

[Mr. Barnett.]

Mr. Benson: The report was unanimous.

Mr. Knowles: The minister's announcement that there is no ban on civil servants being involved in political parties may, of course, be quite interesting if it appears in the Ottawa newspapers tomorrow and across the country; but it seems to me that one should not be quite so sanguine as to think that all that is necessary is for a minister to give his interpretation of legal language. In fact, we are often told that this is the sort of thing we should not ask a minister to do; so I suppose I should be grateful he has done it, and it will be taken as gospel.

• (6:40 p.m.)

As I said earlier, I think the problem that arises now is perhaps one that was not there before, and that is that subclause 2 specifically names what is contrary to the ban which seems to suggest that other things of a political nature are also contrary. The minister is relying heavily on his assertion that this relates to election time. Would he please define election time in this country? Any time is election time.

Mr. Walker: The time between the sittings of the house.

Mr. Knowles: For most of us in this place election time was in 1962, 1963 and 1965. We missed 1966, and I do not know whether or not we have missed 1967. Not only is there a question of the frequency of general elections but there are also by-elections to consider. There are rumours that a whole lot of them will be taking place in a few months. Actually there is nothing in clause 32 which mentions an election. Some candidates have already been nominated for the next election. In fact I think the hon. member for Carleton was present at a nominating convention not long ago which put a candidate in the field. Is that correct?

Mr. Bell (Carleton): Yes, in fact two of them.

Mr. Knowles: And I believe they come from this area, in which there are lots of civil servants. Were there any civil servants present at the meeting that night?

Mr. Bell (Carleton): Yes.

Mr. Knowles: The latter part of clause 32(1)(a) says: "engage in work for, on behalf