

Private Members' Business

I would like to draw my remarks to a close with the observation that over time in Canada, restrictions were placed on the ability of public servants to participate in the political process. The restrictions imposed today are fewer than they were in the earlier days of the Civil Service Act, although even these have been the subject of challenge.

The rationale for restrictions has also evolved from being an attempt to remove a form of patronage to addressing the concern that involvement in political activity by public servants would call into question by the public and by political and administrative superiors the confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the Public Service from the development end through to delivery.

We in Canada have come a long way in this area. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that the loyal staff who have served me so well and continue to do so would and could, if they determined to pursue a career in the Public Service, do so in a manner which will bring credit upon the service and upon themselves.

It would trouble me greatly if the credit that these people so deservedly merit were to be denied them on the grounds, however unsubstantiated, that they gained entry to the Public Service of Canada through what some people have called the back door route.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I have just reviewed the amendment to the Public Service Employment Act. The debate is on the amendment.

[Translation]

Mr. Eugène Bellemare (Carleton—Gloucester): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to speak to a bill which I think is absolutely gross, and that is the amendment to the Public Service Employment Act proposed by my colleague from the New Democratic Party.

Bill C-225 proposes to amend the Public Service Employment Act and give to members' staff certain rights and privileges which Public Service employees do not enjoy.

I think this is positively intriguing, to say the least, and it makes me wonder about the principles of the New Democratic Party which is always talking about defending the rights of workers, and then all of a sudden they blatantly ignore this principle.

We are managers and, in fact, the most senior public servants, since we make decisions concerning the Public Service. And here we are, giving our own staff preferential treatment!

Mr. Speaker, I think this is an aberration!

[English]

Like those of my colleagues who have spoken before me, I have the greatest regard for the staff of members of Parliament, especially my own. We are not easy to work with. Our schedules are very demanding. There are the many added stresses brought on by rushed deadlines and the need to serve a large number of constituents with a great variety of problems.

Having said this, I must also recognize the tremendous effort of Canada's public servants, many of whom live in my riding of Carleton—Gloucester.

The act governing appointments to the Public Service is presently known as the Public Service Employment Act. It was enacted almost 22 years ago and may not be entirely relevant today. However, it has proven to be an act which has guaranteed that the Public Service remains neutral and free from political intervention. I believe that Canada is a tremendous role model in this regard. As governments change and new ministers head different departments, it is reassuring that they are given unbiased and politically unblemished information about the affairs of state.

There are three conditions mentioned in the bill for former employees of members to obtain priority without competition.

[Translation]

Without competition, I think that is totally unacceptable. This is even more surprising, coming from a party that is constantly bragging about defending the rights of workers. And now they turn around and deny their own Public Service fair treatment. I think this is grossly unfair.

The conditions for eligibility would be as follows:

[English]

The person must have been an employee of the Public Service immediately before becoming an employee of a member of Parliament. While being employed in the office of a member of Parliament, the employee must have qualified for appointment under the Public Service Employment Act. The employee must have been employed by a member of Parliament for at least three years. I say, so what? What is this all about?