

Public Service

I see the Member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin) is shaking his head. I do not know how long he has lived in Regina but if he was there in the late forties, as I was, he will recall that the CCF Government at that time introduced political rights for civil servants in that province. While I commend that move, it was done in a rather heavy-handed way. There was much discussion throughout the province about the viability of the method of granting political rights, and I recall that there was a large movement to join the socialist Party because the bureaucracy and the Civil Service were frightened for their jobs. The implementation of political rights for civil servants was not done properly, and I would not want to see that happen with our federal bureaucracy. That is why I would ask that the House use caution and prudence in dealing with this subject-matter.

Certainly we should not forget the history of our Civil Service and its relation to political activity. More than 75 years ago, Parliament, through the adoption of a system of recruitment and selection based on the merit principle, eliminated political patronage in the then Civil Service. I do not believe that should be jeopardized by Bill C-216.

I am sure that Conservative Members of Parliament who have many civil servants in their ridings will fight vigorously to obtain political rights for their constituents. The Conservative Party has gone on record that it will do so. However, I believe there is much work to be done before such a measure can be implemented.

It is my understanding that the Government is currently negotiating with the unions. I believe it is very important that the view of the Public Service unions be taken into account. I would encourage the House to give this Bill careful consideration before accepting all the contents of the Bill.

I refer particularly to Clause 3. While I can accept the legislation up to Clause 3, I have grave concerns about the profound effects of the removal of Subsection 39(2) of the present Act. That subsection reads:

(2) The Board shall not certify as bargaining agent for a bargaining unit, any employee organization that

- (a) receives from any of its members who are employees,
- (b) handles or pays in its own name on behalf of members who are employees, or
- (c) requires as a condition of membership therein the payment by any of its members of

any money for activities carried on by or on behalf of any political party.

I suggest that the ultimate effect of removing that subsection would be staggering. I believe there needs to be much more discussion before anyone would agree to exempt public service unions from demanding money from their members that otherwise might be paid to a political Party. In other words, the union could well become a political Party and an employee may have to join that Party to be in the Public Service. I find it rather disturbing for that to be in Bill C-216.

The Progressive Conservative Party also believes that some relaxation of the current restrictions on public servants' political rights should take place, particularly for those covered by collective agreements. Indeed, it will be very important that

the views of the public service unions be taken into account, as well as those of the Canadian public before the Government finalizes its own views in this important matter. Any proposal will need to take into account the long-standing traditions of our Public Service and reflect the particular needs and desires of our present-day Canadian society and its concerns. We are all aware of the deep implications of the Charter of Rights in this respect.

In our society it is important that all citizens have a voice in the affairs of state and that as many as possible play an active part in public life. At the same time, public interest demands the maintenance of impartiality and professionalism in the Public Service, and of confidence in that impartiality is essential.

Members who have spoken before me have pointed out how important it is that policy advisers in the bureaucracy not criticize that advice outside of their working hours. It only makes common sense that not all members of the Civil Service could be politically active. I am sure that many civil servants throughout the country would agree with that.

I believe that by striking an appropriate balance in all of these important issues—which I believe this Bill does not—we can move on to ensure the political rights of our Public Service so that its members can take their full part in the democratic process in this great country.

Finally, I urge the House to use a great deal of caution and wisdom in supporting this Bill without a great deal of change.

Mr. Benjamin: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I have been here nearly 17 years. I want to draw to the attention of the House that for the first time in my experience a Prime Minister has come in and paid some attention to Private Members' Business and to hear the debate among Private Members. I want the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney), to know that we appreciate it very much and we hope that it becomes a common practice on his part and serves as an example for any succeeding Prime Ministers, no matter whether he is here for four years or for 24 years.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1650)

Mr. Benjamin: We would all be grateful if the Prime Minister would now rise in his place and take part in the debate. It would be a precedent and something which I do not think has happened since the days of Sir John A. Macdonald. Perhaps he could take part in the debate and tell his colleagues, as well as the rest of the House, that he agrees the subject matter of the Bill should be referred to the Standing Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates.

Mr. Jim Hawkes (Calgary West): Mr. Speaker, I should like to second the remarks of the Hon. Member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin) and indicate to the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) that I appreciate the fact that he did not rise in his place, thus giving me the opportunity to speak on this Bill. That was truly gracious and I much appreciate it.