

Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act

subsequently received a medical certificate which eliminated the long term disability pension and made it possible for that employee to re-enter the workplace on Parliament Hill, only to come back to Parliament Hill to be told, "We do not care that the doctor's certificate says that you are in good enough condition to work because we do not think you are". That employee found herself—in this particular case it was a woman—no longer receiving the benefits she was getting when she was ill and she was not getting a salary either. She was falling between two chairs. She was well enough to be off sick pay, but not well enough to work.

I hope that very shortly we will see the day as well when an employee who is injured on the job as a result of using defective equipment is not told to go back to work injured, but can go home to recover the way everyone else would in the private or the public sector outside of the precincts of Parliament Hill.

Finally, I hope the day will come when we will have a system that can be used as an example, a system of which we can be proud. Let us hope we can go to private enterprise or even other public sectors, the provinces, and tell them about our way, that we look after the people who work for us. That does not mean you hire five people to do the job of two, Mr. Speaker. That does not mean you let everybody go home at noon. That is not what the employees are asking for. The employees who work here, and I am sure you know it, Mr. Speaker, because you have been here for a long time, are very good employees and, by and large, they are dedicated and have a strong allegiance to the people for whom they work. They become friends of all of us and they consider Members of this House who are collectively, and I suppose individually, their bosses and representatives. They have a special dedication.

How many times do we see employees on the Hill working well beyond the call of duty? I know what time they start. Many years ago I had the same working hours as some of them. I know they come way ahead of working hours and are here long after, in many cases without getting overtime or any other benefit. They are dedicated. They do a good job for each and every one of us, and they deserve to be treated properly by us all collectively and, needless to say, by all of us individually as well.

It is my hope that we will delay this Bill at least for a little while. There is no need to deal with it now. Let the process take care of itself. In my view, within a very few days it will be determined that the rights of these employees go far beyond what is in Bill C-45. I hope the process will determine that their rights are the same as those of all public servants and all other Canadians. I think that we as Members of Parliament will have fulfilled a much better job and we will have accomplished far more by waiting out that process than by acting hastily now, and in so doing we will be failing to give our people what they deserve.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Questions and comments. The Hon. Member for Lévis (Mr. Fontaine).

Mr. Fontaine: Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the Hon. Member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell (Mr. Boudria) praise the employees of the House of Commons, and of course I would use the same words to describe the human resources available to Hon. Members.

Still, I wonder. The economic situation experienced by the Hon. Member two, three, four or five years ago was more difficult than it is today, interest rates were very high, employers laid off their employees, in short conditions were quite unfavourable to the employees. At the time his Government did not even see fit to act upon the kind of recommendations and representations he is making today.

So why and how can he explain his about turn today when economic conditions have improved and are better for employment, why this reversal and these proposals which neither he nor his Government ever implemented?

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I am not quite sure I understand the meaning of the Hon. Member's question. He seems to be saying that his Government's Bill now under consideration which, as we all know or should know, is practically identical to the Bill introduced under the previous administration, that the Bill presented by the previous Government was somehow not as good as this one because he claims that economic conditions are better now, or something to that effect.

I do not quite follow the logic of what the Hon. Member is telling us. He should know that not very long ago the Canadian labour commission ruled on this case and that the matter is now before the courts. It was not the case a number of years ago, but it is now.

I would therefore urge him to reflect upon this aspect of the case and he will know why it is important today to wait for the end of the proceedings before going ahead with a Bill which, in my judgment, is incomplete, particularly since we hope that in a few days something better will come out of the courts proceedings.

● (1730)

[*English*]

Mr. Althouse: The Hon. Member has had experience as an employee on the Hill. Would he comment on the progress which employees of the Hill made, during his sojourn in Toronto as an M.P.P., toward organizing into an association? As the Member said, they have applied to the Canada Labour Relations Board and seem to be making slow but positive progress in that direction. Could the Member comment on some of the advantages employees would have under the Canada Labour Code as opposed to those they would have under Bill C-45?