

About 350,000 Canadians are employees of Her Majesty, of whom approximately 140,000 are employed by the proprietary and agency corporations and 210,000 are employed by departments of government or departmental corporations. There are over 100 departments or agencies. These statistics emphasize the importance today of the Canadian public service and its widespread ramifications.

All of us in all parts of this house know how exceedingly fortunate Canadians have been in the calibre and quality of the public service. I share to the full the view expressed by the Prime Minister that our public service compares most favourably with that of any nation in the world, and there are many branches of our government service which are unequalled anywhere in scholarship, dedication or accomplishment.

● (5:00 p.m.)

I think the tests we must bring to this new legislation which will be before us must be these: Will it promote efficiency and proficiency within the service? Will it enhance the attractiveness of a civil service career to our ablest young people? Will it assist recruitment of the best minds for our public administration? Will it assist in creating the best climate for constructive effort and dedicated achievement and leading to a fairer and more equitable treatment of public servants in all departments and agencies? Will it improve morale, help to end feelings of frustration and anxiety among civil servants? When the bill goes to a special committee, and I am pleased to know it will, these are some of the tests to which I suggest each of its sections must be submitted.

Collective bargaining, of course, as such is not new in the public service. The Industrial Relations and Disputes Investigation Act applies to employees in most crown corporations. In quite a number of those corporations bargaining agents have been certified under that act and conditions of employment and levels of wages and salaries are established by collective agreement. Most provinces now have a system of negotiation and arbitration with their employees and they have applied such systems to their municipalities.

For many years I have believed personally that procedures of negotiation and arbitration for the federal public service should be recognized and established and that they should adhere as closely as possible to the law in effect governing relations generally

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between employers and employees. I enthusiastically endorse the principle of collective bargaining. I confess that in other days I had hoped that this could have been achieved by an evolutionary process under which convention, tradition and agreement, rather than statutory enactment, would govern the procedure.

I have always been impressed by the national Whiteley councils in the United Kingdom which since 1924 have worked effectively and efficiently there without any statutory basis whatever. But I confess to sharing the disillusionment with the manner in which events, some of them untimely and unfortunate, have rendered section 7 of the Civil Service Act of 1961 less than efficacious, and I have come reluctantly to the conclusion that only a statutory base in feasible in the attempt to obtain the collective bargaining system which all of us want at this time.

If the proposed bill based upon this resolution is similar to that drafted under the supervision of the preparatory committee on collective bargaining in the public service, as the Prime Minister has indicated, I want to express some reservations about its complexity and possible inflexibility. The place, of course, to thresh this out is the special committee, but I want to sound this note of warning now. The system of collective bargaining should not be made too rigid, should not be placed in a legislative strait-jacket, but must be given the opportunity to live, breathe and grow in order to meet and conform to changing circumstances.

I believe that this occasion should not pass without some words of tribute to the work of the national joint council. For about 22 years it has been the forum in which organized civil servants could discuss and consider jointly with officials representing the government a wide range of questions affecting conditions of work. The central questions of salary and wage levels have never been included in the national joint council deliberations and, indeed, as the Heeney report of 1958 pointed out, it was hardly a suitable forum for joint consultation and systematic discussion of this complex subject. But it has to its credit very substantial accomplishments, chief of which are the five-day week and the group medical-surgical plan.

The national joint council has been a useful and constructive body. When the Prime Minister replies, I should like him to indicate what is to be the future role, if any, of the national joint council. The Prime Minister