

Public Service

I welcome the motion of the Member for Ottawa-Vanier (Mr. Gauthier). I regret the fact that my predecessor, the Liberal Member for Ottawa Centre, who sat in the House for five years, never supported this particular measure. In fact, the last time this Bill was before the House of Commons he was instrumental in talking the Bill out, despite promises made by the Liberal Party prior to the 1980 campaign that it favoured political rights for public servants. I respect the position of the Hon. Member for Ottawa-Vanier. I hope he will be successful in ensuring that that is the position of the whole of his Party. It is certainly the position of my Party.

I could talk about this issue at length, Mr. Speaker. It was a major issue in my campaign. I argued for it very strongly, and I think the people in my riding responded. They believed that the vast bulk of public servants could and should have political rights like any other citizen. That is what was called for in the passage in 1982 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In a few weeks a court case which I launched during the election campaign in conjunction with four members of the Public Service to test the constitutionality of these restrictions will in fact come before the Federal Court of Canada.

I would like to conclude by appealing once again to Hon. Members in the government Party. I would like to remind them of the pledges which were made by the Progressive Conservative Party in the responses that the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) sent to the public service unions when they asked for his Party's position on political rights. The Progressive Conservative Party's response to the Public Service Alliance was quite unequivocal. It reads:

The PC Party favours a general removal of the restrictions on political activity, especially for those public servants covered by collective agreements. These restrictions are unnecessary and may not be justifiable under the terms of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. There are some senior public servants whose job responsibilities are very political in nature, and whose rights should be somewhat restricted to prevent conflict of interest, but we are confident that these people could be covered separately, without disenfranchising over 200,000 public servants in the process.

I am essentially in agreement with that position. I believe that position is in accordance with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. By referring the subject matter of this Bill to the Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates we could in fact seek to put flesh and bones on that particular issue. If negotiations with the public service unions come to conclusions, the parliamentary committee could consider what was achieved in those negotiations and provide input and advice.

In its response to the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, the Progressive Conservative position was even more explicit. In the summer, the Prime Minister said:

We believe that this matter should be addressed by an all-party parliamentary committee in consultation with public service organizations, and we believe the situation can be quickly resolved. Much of the work, after all, has already been done as part of the D'Avignon Report, but the current Government has not demonstrated the political will necessary to implement the long-overdue changes.

The present Government has been in power for close to five months now. I believe that there is sincerity on its side in seeking to resolve this issue in a positive way in accordance with the promises which were made. I remind Hon. Members

opposite of the very explicit promise that this matter should be addressed by an all-Party parliamentary committee in consultation with public service organizations. I have had that kind of consultation already and have been encouraged to have the matter sent to a committee.

I would ask Hon. Members to carry through on the promise that their Party made in the course of the election campaign. They should bear in mind that the timing of the consideration before the Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates can be varied relative to any negotiations which would take place. They should bear in mind that because of the Private Member's calendar it may not be possible for one of our Members to bring this matter before the House again for some time. I do not think the matter should be bottled up when there is an opportunity to carry through on a promise made during the election campaign by my Party and also by the Party of the majority of Members in the House.

[Translation]

Mrs. Mailly: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Cassidy) for his confirmation of the sincerity of the Government in wanting to improve the political rights of public servants. I raised the matter myself during my own election campaign, and this is why I want to support the comments made by my colleague for Lanark-Renfrew-Carleton (Mr. Dick). The problem is that the discussion of this issue with the unions is now underway. It is therefore a sensitive issue. We do not want to jeopardize the negotiations. In addition, this subject will certainly come back on the floor of the House because of the limited number of Private Members' Bills on the Order Paper at the moment. Moreover, other Members have introduced Bills on the same issue and they will certainly be debated soon. It will act as a safety valve thus serving the same purpose as was proposed by the Hon. Member when he suggested that the subject matter be referred to a committee in case the negotiations with the unions are not successful.

However, as this subject will be discussed during the debate on other Bills on the Order Paper and as this Bill might even come back to us in a short time, which has already happened in the case of other Bills as the list of Private Members' Bills is not that long for the moment, I simply want to ask the Hon. Member to be patient and let these tricky discussions between the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. de Cotret) and the unions run their course.

● (1640)

[English]

Mr. Vince Dantzer (Okanagan North): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak on Bill C-216. The Bill raises a very important subject. The purpose of this Bill, which is to give political rights to civil servants, is also an important part of this Government's agenda. However, such rights will have a tremendous impact on the way our Public Service is perceived and the way it is in fact run.