

Adjournment Debate

point out that the procedure is not to go into effect until November 15. They would like to see it placed in effect immediately. They would like to see that employees who face lay-off and who secure employment outside the public service receive their lay-off notice so that they can receive severance pay immediately. They are also asking for the waiving of all pension penalties for early retirement due to lay-off. These seem to be eminently fair and reasonable requests of the government as an employer, in the circumstances.

What is called for is something more than just saying if a person is qualified and a position becomes vacant, he has some kind of priority. A number of us who represent the national capital region—and I see my colleague from Ottawa-Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) in the House this evening—have been saying that the government has an obligation to bring about a major retraining program for those who are affected. It is not easy to establish the program until you know precisely the numbers, in what departments they are employed and in what categories. These facts have not yet been established. The departments are in the process of working within the over-all cuts that have been imposed upon them in determining precisely where the redundancy notices are to be given. A plan has to be formulated for dealing with the situation and upgrading employees so that they can qualify on the basis of merit for the opportunities that present themselves.

I hope the Government of Canada will not say it is going to wait for the report of the D'Avignon commission, which is studying the merit principle within the public service and will no doubt be looking at training, and that this is outside what we are going to do. The situation is urgent. The need for planning is now.

The Public Service Commission, faced with a redundancy of 600 language teachers, put into place a special program to deal with that group within its own staff. The 600 are now down to 416 through the normal process of attrition and transfers. It is my sincere hope that the Public Service Commission will be a demonstration to the rest of the public service of what can be done to guarantee fair treatment to those who are affected.

Perhaps this would be a good time to refer to one other matter. I cannot help but feel, as my colleague the hon. member for Ottawa-Vanier has said in this place on a number of occasions, that the retraining procedures within the public service of the Government of Canada are not adequate, and the case for a central training institute is a strong one. If one were in place at this time, it certainly would be of assistance in dealing with the very difficult situations which are coming to our attention.

● (2227)

Perhaps retraining is not the answer for the gentleman who sent me a letter today. This gentleman is 61 years of age and has 23 years of honourable public service and an incredible record of a professional nature. He received his redundancy notice just this week.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Shame.

Mr. Francis: Yes, I feel ashamed about that, but it is my sincere hope that the procedures which are put into place will give this gentleman an opportunity to serve to the normal retirement age, which he had every reason to expect and which his health and capacities would permit under normal circumstances. I think that the Government of Canada has an obligation not only to follow through with the priority clearance procedures which are established but also to do a good deal of retraining.

Mr. Thomas H. Lefebvre (Parliamentary Secretary to President of Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Ottawa West (Mr. Francis) has, as usual, brought to the attention of hon. members of this House and of the government another subject which is of concern to him on behalf of his constituents. He has thereby upheld his record of representing very well the people of his constituency who are members of the federal public service. That is a record of which he can be proud.

As the hon. member may know, government policy officially supports retraining within the public service, particularly to enable surplus employees to take on new duties. Through this policy the government hopes to avoid many lay-offs. The government has made it very clear to deputy ministers and officials responsible for staffing and training that retraining will be undertaken where it will enable a surplus employee to perform the duties of a new job. Deputy ministers have been given authority to provide formal classroom training which can exceed even the normal three-month maximum suggested in Treasury Board policy.

Retraining is common practice now, of course, since every employee new to a job must learn his duties and, in effect, is given on-the-job training. Depending on the learning required, this can be extensive, and more and more Treasury Board and the Public Service Commission are encouraging managers to view employees as flexible and adaptable and to make the most use of on-the-job training for new assignments. I emphasize that such practices apply with special force to surplus employees.

The costs of this kind of training are absorbed into normal operating budgets, and allocation of new funds by Treasury Board for this purpose appears unnecessary. Costs of formal training are separate items, but they too have to be funded from within existing budgets.

Finally, I should like to remind hon. members of the government's strong financial support for retraining generally to help Canadian workers adjust to new work. The programs of the Employment and Immigration Commission serve this purpose. These programs are available to public servants and, as I have outlined previously, a special task force in the commission will be making them aware of this retraining.

Another subject allied with this matter is relocation. The government's policy is to pay the expenses of moving surplus or laid-off employees. They will be reimbursed in the same way as other public servants moved to new jobs. This policy