

Private Members' Business

• (1850)

[English]

Mr. Doug Fee (Red Deer): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to add a few comments of my own to Bill C-225 but, before I do that, I would like to take advantage of the opportunity to congratulate you on your new position in the chair and commend you for the very competent manner in which you have started to assume your new duties.

The subject before us this afternoon, Bill C-225, is not new to most members of the House. In a very broad sense it reflects a concern for employees that every good employer should have. As employers, and each of us as members of Parliament is an employer, we employ capable staff. This may not be a concern that members of the opposition have, but as a member on the government side I often hesitate to brag about how good my staff is. There is always the danger over here that a cabinet minister will think that they are good enough and try to recruit them away from us.

Having said that, I feel I do have a very competent and a very capable staff. They are very well motivated. They often go far beyond what could normally be expected from an employee. They work long hours, often under trying conditions and under great pressure. I am assuming that several members of this House, if not all of them, could say much the same about their staff members. Most of the people employed in this House would be an asset to any employer. But, as mentioned by the hon. member for Beaches—Woodbine, their employment is subject to the re-election of their employer and is often, therefore, very tenuous. Because most members of Parliament are concerned about their staff, this issue has been discussed and discussed many times in this House.

I understand an earlier bill was brought forward in 1984 and since then this has often been the centre of discussion by members informally and formally, on both sides of the House. As the hon. member for Beaches—Woodbine said, it is a non-partisan issue and for a very good reason. This bill deals with an issue with which all members are concerned, that of providing a degree of job security for the respective office staffs, knowing the uncertain climate in which these very capable individuals work. However, my concern with this bill is that in order

to provide a degree of security for our staff members, we may well impose on the rights and employment of others.

Bill C-225 is an act which would amend the present Public Service Employment Act, the legislation under which most of Canada's federal public servants are hired. The Public Service Employment Act, which was promulgated in 1967, is one of several pieces of legislation designed to provide a framework for the management of human resources in the Public Service of Canada. This act has a long history, beginning in Canada in the early part of this century, with roots deeply embedded in the fine traditions of the British civil service and its long commitment to political neutrality.

The first act, governing appointments to the Public Service or, as it was then known, the Civil Service of Canada, came into being as a result of concerns for the competence of the civil service and the prevalence of political patronage in making appointments to the civil service. A succession of acts since that time have all reflected Parliament's commitment to the maintenance of a politically neutral Public Service.

One of the key elements of the current act is the establishment of the Public Service Commission of Canada, an organization which reports to Parliament and is responsible for all appointments to and from within the Public Service. It is the responsibility of this organization to ensure that people who are appointed to the Public Service are qualified.

The normal route into the Public Service is by competitive process and selection of the person or persons to be appointed is on the basis of merit. I cannot conceive how any logical person can debate the principle of hiring on the basis of merit. When we want someone to work for us, we want the best, and we will hire, on merit, the best person we can. The Public Service should do exactly the same.

Having said that, however, there are a number of exceptions allowed to the merit principle which are already embodied in the Public Service Employment Act. The Parliament of the day obviously felt that allowing exemptions to the merit principle would, in certain instances, be in the best interests of the Public Service and, indeed, of Canada as a whole. One example of an exemption or exception to the merit principle is