

There have been no consequences to workplace harmony which can be shown to have flowed from the abolition of controls on public servants' free time electoral participation. There is evidence from where this has been tried that it has been quite acceptable.

The section that forbids this kind of political activity interferes with the fundamental freedoms of public servants far more than is necessary to ensure the impartiality of the Public Service and the public perception of impartiality. It cannot be justifiable to restrict the fundamental freedoms of persons whose freedoms need not be restricted. The Government has not shown that these freedoms need to be restricted.

If the Government wishes to introduce very careful restrictions, it can do so.

Let me quote further from Professor Whitaker. He states:

Democracy must mean more than the simple right to vote, or it has little substantive meaning. Democracy includes the right to participation by all citizens in the democratic process, and full debate on the issues. In a representative democracy, this means that citizenship includes, as an essential attribute the right to participate in "partisan" political activities, namely the election of candidates for office and the right to attempt to influence the electoral choices of fellow citizens through electoral activity.

I regret that Conservative Members are unwilling to support this measure. Let me remind them of the following promise made by the Conservative Party in the last election campaign about political rights for public servants:

The Progressive Conservative Party believes that the present restrictions on political activity are unnecessary and likely not justifiable under the terms of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. While the rights of some senior public servants must be restricted in order to prevent conflict of interest, we feel that this issue could be addressed without disenfranchising over 200,000 public servants in the process.

We believe that this matter should be addressed by an all-Party Parliamentary Committee—

Of course, one will be formed if the House lets this Bill go to committee:

—in consultation with public service organizations, and we believe the situation can be quickly resolved.

We do not need a longer study. This question has been at issue for many years. We know what the answers are. It is a question of perhaps making some very minor amendments. But we would like to see the House proceed to getting this Bill discussed in committee so that we can have measures with respect to which all Canadians can be proud which allow full political participation for the great mass of our public servants.

● (1740)

Mr. David Daubney (Ottawa West): Madam Speaker, I am rising once again to speak on an issue which certainly deserves debate—more than debate, it deserves action.

When I first spoke on this issue two years ago I had reason to hope that the Treasury Board would be taking swift action to define and expand the political rights of over 230,000 adult Canadians who have until now been prevented, often by bureaucratic decree, from the expression of political views which other Canadians take for granted. These are Canada's

public servants, people who are prevented from speaking on political issues, people who are forbidden to answer telephones or deliver handbills for candidates in provincial or federal elections, people who are told, sometimes not by Parliament, the guardian of our democracy, but by an unelected regulatory agency that they must not join their fellow citizens in raising their voices on issues which may be of profound importance to them.

What I am saying now is not new. I have spoken in the House on several occasions outlining in detail the arguments in favour of extension of political rights to public servants, and outlining and attempting to refute the arguments of those who would deprive public servants in Canada of those rights. I have written on this subject in the journal *Policy Options*, published by the Institute for Research on Public Policy in Canada, in *The Ottawa Citizen* and *Le Droit*. Several of my colleagues in the House on this side of the aisle and on the opposition benches have also spoken at length on this subject.

Is it any wonder that this debate here in this Chamber today raises a lingering whisper of debates gone by, a depressing sense of *déjà vu*? I have refrained, myself, from introducing legislation on this subject because I believed what the Treasury Board said when it told us that the Government would introduce legislation.

My Party made a clear commitment during the election campaign to introduce legislation which would define the political rights of public servants and which would extend to most public servants the rights other Canadians take for granted. I do not take this commitment lightly. Initial delays introducing legislation were justified on the basis of the need to investigate the inter-action between extension of these rights and other activities of public servants.

But the debate on the subject has already been very detailed. In my view there can be no justification for refusal to honour the commitment my Party made during the last election campaign. Yet, there is a genuine risk that resolution of this issue will be postponed again, and yet again that legislation will not be brought forward by the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. de Cotret) before the next election. There is a very real chance that we will have no legislation at all, that the commitment we made during the last election will not be honoured. Indeed, we had an open admission just about two weeks ago from a spokesperson for the Board that despite the years of debate legislation probably will not be introduced, and certainly not be effective, before the next election.

What does this mean for public servants? It means that, once again, hundreds—perhaps thousands—of public servants across Canada who have participated liberally—if I may use such a pejorative term—in the election campaigns of all three political Parties will be looking over their shoulders worrying that Big Brother, working out of the Public Service Commission office, will nail them for stuffing envelopes or painting lawn signs. It means that drivers, clerks or technical staff whose work may never touch on policy will remember that they cannot join their neighbours in the simplest of election