

Restraint of Government Expenditures

It has become lamentably clear that the incidence of difficulties in the bargaining process and of the adversary system as such so far as the Government of Canada as an employer is concerned indicate that in fact the easiest course and the course most likely to lead to some success, some speed and some finalization within a reasonable period of time, has been the course of conciliation and strike as opposed to arbitration. This becomes very important when coupled with the matter about which I am going to speak in a moment, having to do with the cost of the government doing business.

It is a fact that man-days lost as a result of strikes and lockouts by federal public service employees amounted to 261,180 in the fiscal period 1974-75 compared with 1,490 man-days lost in the period 1973-74. Excluding the Post Office, the figures were 84,130 man-days lost in the first period and 840 in the second period to which I have referred. Those are the figures as they existed at that time. This is the result of a complete failure on the part of the Treasury Board in its procedure in bargaining on the one hand and the loss of faith by the public service on the other. There was a loss of faith, faith which is essential to the quick and expedient end of discussions between the employer and the employee.

In 1970 some 81 per cent of public servants chose the arbitration route, and only 19 per cent chose the conciliation and strike route. In 1975 only 36 per cent chose arbitration whereas a whopping 64 per cent chose the conciliation and strike route. There should be a message in that for the government in terms of the cost to the government.

Instead of cutting back on family allowances, industrial research, industrial incentives, and a host of other things covered in this bill, the government might well be considering its own housekeeping, asking itself two questions. Why should the Public Service of Canada, which by nature would not move to the conciliation-strike route as an alternative, now move in that direction? The second question is, what does this mean in respect of the stability of the public service as a provider of so many of the essential services of this country?

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I think that if a thorough examination were made of the relationship, the responsiveness, speed and even trustworthiness of Treasury Board bargaining in this regard quite a case could be made pointing out a situation which does not augur well in respect of keeping the cost of government within a reasonable perspective and retaining a reasonable level of service. That is only one side of the coin. I dealt with it because the hon. member for Scarborough East (Mr. O'Connell) made a very thoughtful speech. He wanted to use the comparison approach, comparing public service salaries on the one hand with public sector salaries on the other. This is an approach which is now being discussed. Perhaps it is one we should deal with in a concrete way. The important thing is that if there is to be some maintenance of stability and therefore a maintenance of a reasonable cost factor in doing business, this is one fruitful ground of inquiry for any interested government.

[Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton).]

The other aspect is what was tabled in the House today. I refer to the report of the Auditor General. This government which has been in office since 1963, and since 1968 under the present Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), prides itself on having the great technocrats, the wonderful managers. But it has so mucked up things that the Auditor General said this:

The present state of the financial management and control systems of departments and agencies of the Government of Canada is significantly below acceptable standards of quality and effectiveness.

What I am criticizing, Mr. Speaker, is not the public service of this country but the direction the government has given to that public service. I think very few of my electors are prepared to take lumps for those things which should be blamed on this government. The conspectus filed today is a denunciation of the government's management skills in handling public accounts and public business.

Instead of taking the words of the Auditor General to heart and acting on his recommendations, some of which have been outstanding for 15 years according to this report and some other reports, what do the President of the Treasury Board and the government do? They appoint another royal commission—another cover-up, another delaying tactic, another stonewalling. That is what is happening.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Kaplan) is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Kaplan: Mr. Speaker, I am surprised that the hon. member who has knowledge of the procedures of this House would have reverted to motions when the matter under consideration is Bill C-19.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, the remarks of the parliamentary secretary make all of us wonder how he reached even the level of parliamentary secretary. I hope I do not have to point out to the hon. gentleman that one of the things that is important, that one of the things that suddenly drives this government into its stance on restraint is the spend-thrift attitude it adopted over the years gone by. The government tries to place the blame for that on the backs of the public service and on anyone else, rather than blame itself. This is an indication of the rotten record of a rotten government. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Kaplan) has addressed me as a supposed expert on parliamentary procedure. I have never professed to be an expert on parliamentary procedure.

An hon. Member: Right on.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): In that regard I have a lot of company over there. It has become apparent to any observer of this place that the form of the estimates put before this House and the way in which this House deals with the estimates, that the estimates are unintelligible to even the best of us and certainly to that group over there, and the opportunity for parliament to deal with them is limited. What we need as an adjunct to the work done by the Auditor General is a whole new approach to the operations of this parliament. I say