

Adjournment Debate

Canada recommended to Parliament a charter of rights, which would have granted a number of rights to all Canadians, including the full freedom of association. I pointed out as well that at this time we are denying freedom of association and the right to full collective bargaining to some 3,100 employees on Parliament Hill, namely, employees of the House of Commons, the Senate and the Library of Parliament.

Some 13 years ago a special committee on the public service recommended that this basic fundamental right of collective bargaining be extended to all employees on Parliament Hill, and that we live up to our obligations undertaken pursuant to certain conventions, for example, of the International Labour Organization.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) was a member of that committee and he has been pursuing this matter diligently for years since that committee reported. Two years ago, the then government House leader, now the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen), promised the House that the government would consider very seriously amending the Public Service Staff Relations Act to extend the right of employees of Parliament to choose collective bargaining.

● (2220)

Since that time no action has been taken whatsoever. What is the effect of this denial of collective bargaining rights and the denial of recognition of the right to full collective bargaining to employees on the Hill? What this means is that employees can be hired and fired at will.

Only too recently one of the major bases for hiring on Parliament Hill was the connection that the prospective employee may have had with particular Members of Parliament in office at the time. Therefore, there can be hiring and firing at will.

There is no grievance procedure whatsoever for employees in the offices of Members of Parliament. Only recently was there a grievance procedure established, and it is not a written grievance procedure open to other employees on Parliament Hill.

There may be unreasonable working hours or working conditions. For example, security guards on the Hill have been told that tomorrow every guard must work whether or not he or she was scheduled to be off. They do not know whether that time will be made up. These are completely arbitrary working conditions.

Working conditions may be unhealthy or unsafe. We need only point to the example of the print shop and the deplorable conditions existing there. There is no control whatsoever over basic working conditions. There may be arbitrary discipline or other problems with respect to promotion, salaries or other working conditions. As we know, salaries are handed down from on high. There is no opportunity for employees on the Hill to bargain collectively.

There are still employment ghettos on the Hill; women who are working as cleaning ladies and men working as mainte-

nance staff. Surely in this day and age our Parliament should be setting an example and not perpetrating these kinds of sexist hiring practices.

I gave the example of the lack of grievance procedure for employees who may be sexually harassed. My reason for raising that example was simply to illustrate the fact that there is no appeal mechanism available to an employee if he or she feels there is a legitimate grievance of that nature.

When I raised this matter in the public accounts committee with Madam Speaker, she said quite properly that this matter should be raised with the government, that employees on Parliament Hill had no collective bargaining rights and that she as Speaker had no power to extend these fundamental rights to employees on the Hill.

It was a fine example of buck passing on February 18 when in response to my question, instead of suggesting that we should have this kind of legislation to bring Parliament into the twentieth century, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) said we should go back to the Speaker.

The Speaker says she has no jurisdiction and the Prime Minister refuses to accept the responsibility of the government to amend the Public Service Staff Relations Act to allow the right to choose. That is all we are talking about, the extension of the right to employees of the Senate, House of Commons and Library of Parliament, to choose collective bargaining for themselves, not the imposition of anything upon them. As I said before, in the present day we here on Parliament Hill are, in many ways, in the backwater of labour relations.

I urge the government to move forward and accept the recommendation made some 13 years ago by the committee, which examined this whole question very carefully, to live up to the commitment made by the then government House leader some two years ago to amend the legislation to permit the 3,100 employees on Parliament Hill full collective bargaining rights.

I would like to refer to one argument that is sometimes raised with respect to the right to strike. The government will know that essential employees can be designated. If Parliament is sitting and employees are deemed to be essential, those employees can be designated as indeed employees were designated during the strike of the clerical staff. I therefore suggest that that argument is without foundation.

In conclusion, I urge the government to seriously consider the fact that in this year where we are extending the freedom of association to all Canadians through a charter of rights, we should clean up our own house and extend the fundamental right of freedom of association of collective bargaining to the 3,100 employees on Parliament Hill.

● (2225)

Mr. D. M. Collette (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson) knows full well the government is committed to improving and protecting the rights of individual Canadians, as witnessed by the constitutional resolution now