

● (1710)

The Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps) moved a very appropriate amendment to delay the Bill for six months. At that time we did not know some of the things we know now. However, she was right. We had to delay discussion on the Bill for six months in order to provide the time required for the process which I described just a few moments ago.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, why do the employees of the House want a union? Undoubtedly the first answer is that they want one, and they have the right to have one because it is the collective right of all employees in this country. Even if they do not exercise this right, the mechanism should be in place so they may do so whenever they wish. Right now they are not allowed to do that.

Yes, Bill C-45 would give them that power, Mr. Speaker, but a useless power, an incomplete power because, first of all, the employees would not have as many benefits as they would enjoy if they were accredited under the labour commission. Secondly, it is a useless power because it is incomplete in the sense that Bill C-45 does not give them the right to strike, nor other rights which Government employees normally have.

As I said in the House earlier today, I first joined the labour market on October 25, 1966 as an employee of this House, as a servant of those who are elected to represent Canadians. Mr. Speaker, I would not pretend to be an expert in all cases because that would not be true. But I think that as an employee of this House for 14 years, I remember very well certain cases of employees of the House, and some of them are still open even today.

The employees of the House have been asking for their collective rights for a long time, Mr. Speaker, but the need to have these privileges, the need to have these rights if you wish, to form a union and enjoy other collective rights has become more pressing in recent years. And why? I discussed this earlier this afternoon in my comments on the excellent speech made by the Hon. Member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow), when I asked him whether he agreed that although procedures were not clearly formalized a couple of years ago, there was nevertheless a certain balance between the rights and privileges of employees and the authority of supervisors.

Today, this balance no longer exists. Mr. Speaker, I agree it is a good thing and that it was a good policy to formalize the procedures with respect to managers and supervisors on the Hill. What I cannot accept, however, is that these rights and privileges and procedures were increased or improved for the managers, while nothing of the kind was done for House employees. And I think it is this imbalance which has created a situation where morale among House employees is extremely low. Parliamentary employees feel totally frustrated because they have no way of defending their individual and collective rights.

I listened carefully to the speech made by the Hon. Member for Winnipeg-North, when he was describing the cases of

*Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act*

certain parliamentary employees, with their grievances and their problems. In each case, I could recognize who the person was. I could even name them each and every one of them. In many cases, I could even give the names of family members, because I know nearly all of them.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that we as parliamentarians and legislators should grant our employees the kind of rights that other establishments, both in the private and the public sector, would want to emulate. However, Mr. Speaker, I would not want any employer to emulate the procedures existing today on Parliament Hill.

[English]

I certainly would not want anyone to use our procedures as a model. The way we treat our employees should be an example to everyone else in the public and private sectors. However, it is not an example of which we can be proud.

Why is that so? It is so because principally we as Members collectively fear, whether or not we admit it, unions on Parliament Hill. Perhaps there is a fear that the day will come when one of us will have to cross a picket line in order to come to the Chamber and do his job on behalf of our constituents. Perhaps it is a morbid fear of the picket line which has stopped us from granting our employees collective rights. If that is so, is it a good enough reason to deny someone their rights? Potentially we could put ourselves in a situation which could be viewed or seen as embarrassing. If that is our reason for failing to give our employees their rights, it is a pretty poor reason indeed. It is not one we would permit anyone else to use. If we would not permit anyone else to use the same criteria, why are we using them ourselves?

● (1720)

I have said before in this House that if we as legislators cannot take proper care of and pay attention to the 3,000 employees who come under our jurisdiction, what makes us so fit to take care of the interests of the 25 million more people elsewhere in the country? I submit to you and to all Members of this House, Mr. Speaker, that it is a shame, and it is a dark shadow on every one of us, not to have been able to take care of the rights and privileges of Canadians who work on Parliament Hill. It is my hope that in a very few days we will see the final stages of that process in the courts that will give employees of this House the same rights and privileges as other Canadians have. Once and for all this issue can be out of the way and the employees of Parliament, if they wish to—it is very important to stress that because it has to be their collective right—can exercise their rights to unionize or in any other way collectively air their grievances and needs to us as their employers.

It is my hope with that process that no longer will we see an employee being terminated because he or she was ill and someone was hired while he or she was on leave only for that employer to come back to find out that the job was not there. I hope that no longer will we see such cases as that of the employee who was on long term disability for some time who