

Public Service Merit System

That is open to the interpretation the Prime Minister has placed on it, but it is also open to other interpretations.

Therefore I agree it is highly important that this whole subject be clarified and I support a reference to the committee where the Public Service Commission can be questioned and can clarify its position and make it very clear to the country exactly what it has in mind. I do not think there will be any question, if the Public Service Commission stays within the authority granted to it by statute of this Parliament, that it has no alternative but to support the merit system in the public service. Any possible doubts in that regard should be removed because it is very clear that the opening pages of the report in particular have caused great unease in this city and probably throughout the land.

Mr. David Lewis (York South): Mr. Speaker, I too regret, although I do not blame the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), the fact that we were not able to see a copy of his statement before he made it.

I will not read the parts of the first page of the report which the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) quoted. But I wonder whether the commission would have written that page if it did not have something in mind that suggests erosion of the merit system. I cannot understand or imagine the commissioners writing some of the sentences and paragraphs at the beginning of this report, some of which the Leader of the Opposition has quoted, without there being something in their minds having to do with the merit system and an intention to erode it. I do not understand how the Prime Minister can read these passages and say that the commission is still standing by the merit system. Obviously it is not. There may be useful and socially desirable ways in which the merit system may be applied somewhat differently than it has been in the past, but I have read the section very carefully and it is not what this section of the report says. The press is not to be blamed and nobody else is to be blamed for feeling uneasy that these statements have found their way into the report.

I think it is important to state now that what we are dealing with is not merely a matter of policy. We are dealing with a statutory requirement. I remind hon. members that section 10 of the Public Service Employment Act specifically states that appointments to the public service shall be made on merit.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lewis: It is not merely a matter of policy of the commission; it is a matter of a statutory requirement for the commission to act in a certain way.

I must also mention—I remember it very vividly—that during the discussions of the special committee on the Public Service Employment Act and the Public Service Staff Relations Act in 1966, of which I was a member, as was my colleague, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), I argued with the then secretary of the Treasury Board, Mr. George Davidson, against the provisions in those acts which retained in the Public Service Commission exclusive rights with regard to appointment, promotion, classification, reclassification and all

[Mr. Stanfield.]

the other areas of job security. They took those areas out of the ordinary collective bargaining process. Your Honour will see in a moment why this is relevant. The reason they gave for taking those areas of job security out of the collective bargaining process was that they could not leave them to negotiation. Appointment promotions and classifications had to be done on the merit system. That was the reason they gave us for taking out of the collective bargaining process what is normally the most important area in it.

• (1420)

I am also pleased the Prime Minister agrees that this report, and particularly this part of it, should go to a committee for consideration. My hon. friend from Winnipeg North Centre has a motion precisely on this point, under Standing Order 43 which he intended to move and which, with Your Honour's permission, he will move. He has given the government House leader notice of his motion and I hope, therefore, that it will be unanimously accepted. We are ready to have it accepted without debate.

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Caouette (Témiscamingue): Mr. Speaker, let us call a spade a spade. The controversy over the merit system as applied in the public service is not new. In fact, we often hear that, at the present time, if a candidate does not speak one of the two official languages, he cannot get a job.

There is in the civil service as elsewhere prejudice with regard to hiring. I feel that the criterion of competence should have priority over all others with regard to employment in the public service.

Mr. Speaker, I feel that it is absolutely unfair to tell a unilingual civil servant of 50, for instance: If you fail to learn the other official language, you will lose your job within a year or two. This is not the way to correct the situation.

If we really wish to respect both official languages, I think that the best way to do it, as far as the government and civil service are concerned, is to encourage the provinces which have jurisdiction over education to teach in both official languages as early as grade 1. Thus, within five years, we could remove the misunderstandings and we could surely progress, through the qualifications of bilingual public servants.

[English]

COMMISSION COMMENTS CONCERNING MERIT SYSTEM—
REQUEST FOR UNANIMOUS CONSENT TO MOVE MOTION
UNDER S.O. 43

Mr. R. Gordon L. Fairweather (Fundy-Royal): Mr. Speaker, had the Prime Minister been able to give us notice of his intention to make the statement he has just made we might have saved a certain amount of time. Nevertheless, I rise to propose a motion in a case of urgent and pressing necessity under Standing Order 43. The matter concerns, as Your Honour might suspect, the declaration by the Public Service Commission in its annual report that the commission intends to interpret unilaterally the principle of appointment by merit contained in the Public Service Employment Act. I therefore