

Civil Service Act

Mr. Pigeon: Would the hon. member permit a question?

Mr. Denis: No, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Pigeon: You are afraid to reply?

Mr. Denis: No, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Pigeon: Shame.

(Text):

Mr. Bell (Carleton): Mr. Chairman, the mood of the committee this afternoon is a very pleasant one although I have known it, on occasion, to be somewhat more relevant. However, of that latter aspect I do not complain because I am sure that at least the civil servants in Ottawa will understand that perhaps this bill is, in some respects, the victim of other circumstances on parliament hill.

At this stage of the discussion, sir, of this very significant legislation, I doubt if any really useful purpose would be served by any extended references on my part to the very many things which have been mentioned by hon. members on all sides of the committee. On each of the clauses of the bill there will be an opportunity available to make comment in relation to what has been said. I think it would be more appropriate to do so at those times. I wish, sir, to join with hon. gentlemen on all sides of the house who have referred to the high competence with which the hon. member for Inverness-Richmond presided over the special committee. He displayed a deep knowledge of the Civil Service Act, judicial impartiality and a skill in presiding. It was a real pleasure for me to participate in the work of the committee because I feel that all hon. gentlemen recognized the vital importance of the task and approached it with a genuine objectivity and, in almost all cases, on a nonpartisan basis.

The maintenance of high standards in our public service, the preservation and improvement of the merit system, the maintenance of the independence of the civil service commission itself, the continuing improvement in the conditions of public service employment, these things are of the very essence, the very lifestream of our whole system of government. Adequate compensation based upon the principle of a fair comparison, conditions of employment to equal at least those of commerce and industry is essential if a civil service career is to be as rewarding and satisfying, as attractive as a professional or business career. I believe that a career in the Canadian civil service must have a status and respect that will be an incentive, a stimulus to young Canadians, dedicated in the sciences and the professions, in administration and in other basic fields.

[Mr. Denis.]

Yesterday in the course of his speech, the hon. member for Edmonton-Strathcona used some phrases which might well be wrenched out of context to create an impression which I hope he did not intend to leave. Some of those phrases could cause deep misunderstanding among many dedicated civil servants. He spoke of there being too many barriers between the taxpayers and the civil service; of civil servants seeking to ram things down the throats of ordinary citizens. I will not use the various other phrases. If his words are to be taken literally, then I can only say his experience is very different from mine. During my 25 years in the practice of law and in public life I have had to deal with civil servants at all levels and on an almost daily basis. I say without hesitation that I think I have perhaps had more contact with more civil servants over a longer period than probably any other member except the hon. member for Bonavista-Twillington and possibly the hon. member for Ottawa West. I have found, almost without exception, unflinching courtesy, genuine helpfulness, a genuine desire to be of service and a real dedication to the job. Those are qualities which I think have not been exceeded by the employees of any private employer.

It would be idle for anyone to assert that the civil service is in a state of Utopia. Abuses do, of course, occasionally arise in personnel administration and otherwise. I do assert, however, with the greatest confidence that they are very much the exception and not the rule.

Hon. gentlemen on all sides of the house have spoken of this new bill as a considerable improvement on the bill in its form at second reading and as it was sent to the special committee. With that view, I most decidedly agree. I think the committee, in this respect, made a considerable improvement upon the bill that was given second reading. I believe the bill itself is a considerable advance over the old Civil Service Act. Within the new framework which we have in this bill, I believe we can build, wisely, effectively and efficiently, not only in the interests of the civil service but of Canadians generally.

There have been many questions asked during the course of this rather long debate. I submit all these further matters which require elucidation may be dealt with under the individual clauses. I point out to the committee, of course, that this bill has had a very exhaustive, very detailed study in the special committee to which members on all sides of the house have contributed very effectively.

Clause agreed to.