

*Private Members' Business*

aware of the extraordinary implications of the bill before us today. The bill provides that irrespective of the merit, skills and experience of other persons, including public servants, that would qualify them for a given position, when it is established that a member of the staff of a member of the House of Commons has the minimum qualifications for the position in question, that employee, and I quote from the bill, . . . is entitled . . . to be appointed without competition . . . in priority to all other persons", subject to section 30 of the Public Service Employment Act, under which a public servant returning from leave of absence has priority.

I will get back later to this aspect of the bill, in other words, its content. The question I think we should answer first is this: do the economic circumstances of members' staff, when they leave their jobs, justify taking extraordinary measures? The explanatory note to the bill proposed by the hon. member for Beaches—Woodbine does not indicate there has been any kind of study of the circumstances of our employees, that would justify the proposed measures.

I think we have a duty to all Canadians, and I to my constituents, to point out that this bill would give preferential treatment and, as a result, we would subsequently be accused of putting our own interests and those of our employees before those of our country.

My second concern is this: even if the facts about the present circumstances of our staff were to give cause for concern, is the solution proposed by Bill C-225 the appropriate one?

I think we should remember the two main objectives our Parliament had in mind in the last century when it passed the legislation that preceded the Public Service Employment Act, and I am referring to the Civil Service Act, which took away the ministers' authority to appoint public servants and gave it to an independent parliamentary commission, the Civil Service Commission.

Its initial purpose was to make sure that in the Public Service, both entry and advancement would depend on the merits of the candidates and on no other consideration. Its second purpose was to establish a clear separation between the executive power and the Civil Service

on one hand, and the legislative power on the other. In fact, the separation of powers proved to be beneficial. Today, it is one of the advantages of our system of government. According to this principle, the role of the Public Service is to advise the government and carry out its decisions in a matter that is loyal, impartial and neutral.

Thus I would be afraid that the bill before us be seen by Canadians as mainly avoiding two important principles: the merit principle and the neutrality-objectivity principle.

Is it to say that there is no other means to improve our employees' career plan?

Bill C-225 would also entail serious practical problems.

As I indicated earlier, except for the civil servant on leave, that bill would give our employees the highest priority access to Public Service positions. That alone could create serious difficulties for the government as well as for the Public Service when attempting to resolve downsizing problems.

I want to emphasize the fact that, under paragraphs 4.1(a) and (b) of this bill, a person doesn't have to have been employed in the office of a member of Parliament for a minimum period of time to be entitled to a priority appointment.

Needless to say that, under this bill, the Public Service Commission would have to assess all employees of MP's applying for a job before considering public servants affected by personnel reductions or lay-offs. So, the efforts made by the government, by Treasury Board and by the Public Service Commission to implement the Work Force Adjustment policy would be a lot less effective than under the present system.

I will conclude by saying that my intention here is to underline certain serious questions relating to this bill. They are questions of principle, Mr. Speaker. They are so important that, in my view, it is imperative, in the interest of the Canadian public, of Parliament and of the Public Service, that we find answers before a legislative measure of that scope can be implemented.