

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

One of the scientists selected to do the work on insect hormones was Dr. A. Mansingh, who was then employed with the United States Army Laboratories in Massachusetts. Dr. Mansingh was a native of India who had originally come to Canada and wanted to return here. He accepted an appointment from the Public Service Commission early in 1967 as a research chemist in insect physiology. He is apparently well qualified in his field and had two other excellent offers in Canada at that time, which he turned down. He did so in order to come back and engage in what he thought was an important national project.

Dr. Mansingh worked in the systems biology group at Victoria, B.C. His research involved the screening of extracts of Canadian forest trees for hormone mimicking action, the studying of their biochemical effects on the growth, development, reproduction and survival of insects and the feasibility of their field application. This work was started in co-operation with Dr. V. Hach, the senior research chemist of the MacMillan Bloedel Limited research and development department, who provided extracts from the wood and bark of several types of forest trees. The insect hormone research project was transferred to Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, and Dr. Mansingh was scheduled to be transferred to Sault Ste. Marie on August 19 of this year.

● (10:00 p.m.)

Two hours before his departure for Sault Ste. Marie, Dr. Mansingh was informed by his associate director in Victoria that his position had become redundant, and he is being laid off effective November 19, 1969. The reason for this lay-off was outlined in a letter received by Dr. Mansingh dated August 19 which reads as follows:

The severe budget restriction to the Public Service, which will hold our departmental budget for the fiscal year 1970-71 at the 1969-70 level, has resulted in the curtailment of certain research programs within our branch. The hormone program at the Insect Pathology Research Institute, Sault Ste. Marie, is one program that has been cancelled. Your transfer to Sault Ste. Marie was dependent on your assignment to this work. As a result of this decision to cancel the program, your position is now considered redundant. In keeping with ministerial instructions, this will confirm that your lay-off will take effect three months from today, i.e. November 19, 1969.

I am advised, Mr. Speaker, that the Professional Institute of the Public Service appealed unsuccessfully to the Treasury Board and that Dr. Mansingh presented a grievance under the Public Service Staff Relations Act

[Mr. Aiken.]

which was also unsuccessful. Accepting the fact that the public service has been allowed to grow beyond reasonable proportions, surely some reason and moderation should be used in reducing it, and the factors involved made known to those who are laid off.

The following questions arise which I wish to pose to the minister. First, why was a project of this nature dropped at a time when it seemed to become very important? Second, what guidelines have been established for laying off employees as a result of budgetary restrictions? I am told that in spite of the promise made by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) there have been no consultations with staff associations on the subject of lay-offs. Third, is the job being considered the most important part of the layoff or is it the seniority of the man in the service? Four, is the government aware of the terribly low morale now existing in the public service, particularly in the professional field?

My fifth question is, since many people accept public service positions in preference to industrial and commercial positions only because of the security of tenure, how does the government hope to maintain an interested professional public service in the face of indiscriminate firings that are now taking place? Finally, if the insect pathology research has no value at this time or if Dr. Mansingh was incompetent, neither of which seems to be the case, I ask the minister to spell out exactly why the project was cancelled and this scientist laid off.

That outlines the grievance I have, Mr. Speaker. It may be the matter is not within the minister's knowledge. My intention this morning was merely to ask him to look into the matter. I hope the minister will now be able to at least satisfy these specific questions. If he can do anything to lay down the guidelines under which people are being fired, it will be very helpful to those in the public service.

Hon. Jack Davis (Minister of Fisheries and Forestry): Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the hon. member for Parry Sound-Muskoka (Mr. Aiken) for giving me the opportunity to say a word about our priorities and the manner in which individual research programs are assessed. In the Forestry Service priorities for research are determined in close consultation with industry, with the provinces and with the universities. In this particular case the over-all program is administered, or certainly, priorities are determined, by a joint advisory board.