

*Government Orders*

Bill C-26, the Public Service Reform Act before the House today, is one more step towards making the Public Service capable of meeting the challenges of the twenty-first century. The bill provides for amendments to the Public Service Employment Act, the Public Service Staff Relations Act, the Surplus Crown Assets Act and the Financial Administration Act. These amendments will make the Public Service more flexible, more efficient and better equipped to focus its efforts on serving the Canadian public.

These amendments are not intended as a thorough reform of the legislation I just mentioned. They are aimed at simplifying and updating certain provisions which, according to the government, should be changed because they are outdated and no longer serve a useful purpose in productive management of Public Service resources.

Perhaps I might explain very briefly the nature of these amendments. First of all, the proposed amendments to the Public Service Employment Act would simplify staffing while ensuring that measures to protect against abuse as well as measures for effective redress are maintained. In some cases these measures would be enhanced. Bill C-26 would confirm the mandate of the Public Service Commission to uphold the merit principle and provide reliable mechanisms for protecting the staffing system against political and bureaucratic favouritism.

It would contain a new provision on transfers which would make it easier for departments to assign employees to other positions at the same level. This provision would increase opportunities for public servants to acquire new skills and work experience. The proposed amendments would provide protection against abuse and, more specifically, ensure independent review by a third party. Managers would have less trouble filling positions, since the bill would contain provisions concerning probation and security classifications.

The present legislation's provisions for demotion and release would be consolidated and transferred to the Financial Administration Act. A common system of redress would be available under the Public Service Staff Relations Act.

• (1040)

The amendments to the Public Service Staff Relations Act would modernize the rules governing collective bargaining, increase the number of dispute settlement

mechanisms and considerably simplify job classification in the Public Service.

Employment equity groups would benefit from the bill's provisions. As a national institution, the federal Public Service must reflect the diversity of the people that it serves. The bill would expressly provide for employment equity programs. It would specify the role of the Public Service Commission and Treasury Board Secretariat in this regard.

The bill would make it easier for departments to meet unexpected workloads and respond to seasonal and short-term fluctuations. It would be easier to hire casual employees for periods up to three months and it would be possible to extend their appointment for three months.

The amendments to the Public Service Staff Relations Act would recognize the right to free collective bargaining and public servants' right to strike. Reducing the number of occupational groups, which is now 71, could simplify collective bargaining considerably. The number of levels within these groups is also to be reduced.

Bill C-26 temporarily establishes legislative authority to extend this reduction for a six-year period during which union affiliations would be respected. It is estimated that about 100,000 classification actions are taken every year.

The proposal seeks to extend the scope of dispute settlement methods. Arbitration boards are to be selected in the same way as conciliation boards and the parties would be allowed to appoint members to such boards and extend their advisory role so that they can look into a broader range of issues.

Furthermore, the Public Service Staff Relations Board would be given a greater choice of dispute settlement mechanisms. Bargaining units could submit all their outstanding issues to binding arbitration.

Finally, pursuant to the proposed amendments to the Surplus Crown Assets Act, departments could dispose directly of their surplus assets or have Supply and Services Canada do so for them. They would receive the proceeds of the disposal, which they could spend as they saw fit. These amendments should improve the management of surpluses, increase revenue and especially reduce the cost of storing and handling surplus goods.

Mr. Speaker, I ask hon. members to support speedy passage of this bill. With these major reforms to the way