

staff of Members of the House of Commons and ministerial staff were not to be treated differently.

This amendment—and I ask members of the House of Commons to read it—treats the staff of the House of Commons differently. In fact, it puts them on a rate term comparison in a position inferior to the staff of Members of Parliament. I want my friends to go to their offices and explain that to their staff later on. When it is explained to their staff, I want them to show the staff motion No. 3 and that it stands in the name of the President of the Treasury Board, who has tried to make a cheap political point on the backs of the staff of the Members of the House of Commons.

That is what I want to tell him. It is the Johnston amendment. It is the cheap Johnston amendment that is at stake here; let us make no mistake about it. I hope that the President of the Treasury Board before this debate is over will have the guts, the integrity and the intestinal fortitude to admit that he made a fool of himself. He has used hardworking people in this House of Commons to make a cheap political point and I hope that he will withdraw that stupidity and inequity from the statute books of this country. That is what I want him to do. I hope that the backbenchers of his own party will realize what it is.

The Minister of State for Multiculturalism (Mr. Fleming) has the figures in front of him now. They were given to him by the hon. member for Rosedale (Mr. Crombie). I hope he will join in a request to remove an inequity.

Mr. Fleming: The inequity started with your amendment.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): I want to turn to the bill at hand. I am sorry the debate had to start off on that foot. This debate and the problems facing the country have, I think, been dealt with in this House of Commons with a reasonably equal hand on those counts. I believe that most Canadians are worried to death about the situation in which the country finds itself. Most Canadians are not interested in cheap political shots at the expense of the country or the people in it. Most Canadians do not want to see particular groups of people penalized and certainly they do not want to see groups within groups doubly penalized.

That is the view of most Canadians. They are worried about the country. As they worry about the country, they are joined by others who have commented on how we got to this state. The C.D. Howe Institute, in its blistering commentary a few days ago, reported:

Canada's primary problem has been mismanagement of its economic affairs since the early 1970s by its federal leadership.

This commentary says that Canada may well have reached a point where it is impossible for its leaders to secure the co-operation needed to make a positive response to the country's economic predicament.

● (1430)

When the minister says that people believe or hope that this program will work—and even those who say it will not work hope it will work—I say that whether we believe or hope the

Public Sector Compensation Restraint Act

program will work, it must work if we are to advance ourselves. Therefore, it has to be given an opportunity to work. Public servants are no different from anyone else. When it comes to belief in their country, they are not second-class citizens. Public servants as a group are prepared to participate in what the minister called a crusade a week or so ago. I say to government members that when they say that, they do not want to look over their shoulders and see the empty ranks behind them.

This is why I asked a question today in the House of Commons about what the government intends to do in its relationship with the provinces in terms of ever-increasing rents which tenants will have to pay while salaries become limited. This is why the meeting with municipal mayors yesterday was important. Every segment of society will have to join in if it is to work, not for the government, but for the country. That is the position which this party takes as we enter this debate. People are hoping against hope that it will work. That is the important aspect.

Let me deal with another matter which I think is important to us, important to the country, important to peace and important to establishing a basis for understanding in Canada. One thing which concerned me about Bill C-124 when it came out was its absolute assault on the collective bargaining process. There are some people in Canada who look upon that process as having only one ending; it can only end in a strike. Well, it does not always end in a strike. An interesting thing about public service bargaining is that there is a choice. These employees have an opportunity to choose the arbitration route or the conciliation-strike route. The statistics indicate that it is still the arbitration route which the largest number of public servants chooses to go because they want their disputes settled, and they want them settled peacefully. No one likes these things hanging over their heads. But I worry about a trend of more and more choosing the conciliation-strike route because of some narrowness in the grounds upon which matters can be arbitrated.

What worried me about Bill C-124 was that there seemed to be a fear on the part of the government that public servants were salivating in anticipation of going out on strike. That is not the case at all. I thought Bill C-124 was an assault on collective bargaining, but the minister and the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald) are correct that, after hearing the evidence from all sources which came before the committee and after hearing the pleas of members of the Standing Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates, so admirably chaired by the hon. member for Ottawa-Vanier (Mr. Gauthier), the government decided to relent and give some flexibility.

What concerns us about the flexibility is that it is still within the right of government to say whether or not any discussions can begin at all. I do not think that is fair, balanced or reasonable. This is why there appears on the Order Paper an amendment in the name of the hon. member for Rosedale which we will discuss in detail a little later. It would preserve the right to