

Government Orders

Mr. Len Hopkins (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke): Mr. Speaker, I want to say today that I have had first-hand experience in dealing with the President of the Treasury Board on the item of Public Service 2000, having chaired the public accounts committee for three years.

I have a number of letters here that were sent to me by the minister at that time. I want to say that the Liberal Party opposes clauses of the bill that undermine the merit principle without any safeguards, that destabilize the Public Service, that discourage the hiring and retention of highly qualified individuals—and I do mean discourage them—and that reduce accountability, which is probably one of the worst of all. Everyone must be accountable.

We oppose the bill on that basis and we also oppose it on the basis that the President of the Treasury Board did not keep faith with the public accounts committee of this House of Commons. I will point out at what stage this happened.

On November 8, 1990 I tabled this recommendation and many more in this House from the public accounts committee. Item 17 of that report says:

Your committee considers that there is a need to pause once the task force recommendations have been put in final form—

That is the task force recommendations, not the legislation. It continues:

—before proceeding with the introduction of legislative amendments in the House. The process of Public Service 2000 must be changed to allow for meaningful and open consultation with greater involvement of front-line employees.

Our recommendation 18 was:

Your Committee recommends that the Government give consideration to:

(a) tabling a discussion paper prior to proceeding with the introduction of legislative amendments and/or administrative changes and that this discussion paper set out the principal conclusions and recommendations arising from Public Service 2000;

(b) referring the aforementioned discussion paper to a Special Committee of the House on Reform of the Public Service and that the Special Committee conduct a consultation process involving employees, the Public Service unions and other interested parties and report back to the House within a reasonable period;

We wanted an answer from the government on this and other recommendations by November 30, 1990. On December 10 the President of the Treasury Board, with

whom we dealt a great deal in the public accounts committee, sent me this letter which said in part:

I am pleased to inform you that the Government will shortly be issuing a White Paper setting out its policy for the future of the Public Service. This will afford an opportunity for consultations with Public Service unions and other interested groups on this important subject, following which the Government would intend to introduce appropriate legislation.

He went on to say about the public accounts committee:

I agree with you and your colleagues that it would be desirable for the Government's legislative proposals for renewal of the Public Service to be considered by a special House committee—

I repeat, by a special House committee. That was very clear indeed, and he says it right here in his own letter to me:

I would intend to table a motion to that effect.

The reason I said the minister did not deal in good faith with the public accounts committee was that no special committee of this House was set up. The government simply barged through and did its own consultations and then turned around and put its own ideas in legislative form and brought in this bill, which we have before us today. He did not keep faith with what he put in writing in his own letter.

On January 25, 1991 I wrote to the minister about this very matter: "I am writing you regarding your response of December 10, 1990 which, by the way, I read to the members of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts". We were delighted that he was going to set up a special committee. "In particular, I would single out again the recommendation in our seventh report that a discussion paper be referred to a special committee of the House on reform of the Public Service. You clearly state in your letter of December 10 that: 'I agree with you and your colleagues that it would be desirable for the government's legislative proposals for the renewal of the Public Service to be considered by a special House committee, and I would intend to table a motion to that effect' ". I went on to say: "To my knowledge no such motion has been tabled".

On March 15, 1991 the President of the Treasury Board wrote this letter to me which said: "Thank you for your letter of January 25, 1991"—this came in almost two months later; it is the urgency he gave to the letter of January 25 that I appreciate—"on Public Service reform in which you asked if it was my intention to pursue a reference of this important matter to a special commit-