

Supply—Public Works

and he had not been extremely active politically: I was dealing with the Department of Public Works. I wonder if he would answer the question by saying whether any employees have been severed from their employment for that reason. My understanding of the case he had in mind is that a member of parliament on his responsibility as a member of parliament and also on his statement that he knows that a person has actively participated in a campaign, may because of that fact require the severing of an employee from his employment. But my understanding of the situation is that that rule does not apply to civil servants as such but applies to the other categories of casuals, supernumeraries or the like and that in so far as civil servants are concerned, the matter is governed by the pertinent sections of the Civil Service Act.

However, the question to which I wanted to obtain an answer from the minister if he can give it now—and if he cannot do so, I shall be pleased to wait until a later date—was whether or not in his Department of Public Works, which is a huge department of employment in that respect, there have been any employees who have been severed from their employment because of political activity.

Mr. Green: I would inform the hon. member that one of the employees of the Department of Public Works had himself appointed a returning officer for the election last year and took a leave of absence to act in that capacity. That employee has since resigned. That sort of thing, in my judgment, is inexcusable.

Mr. Pickersgill: Did the minister say “to be a returning officer”? A returning officer is an appointment of the crown.

Mr. Chevrier: Does the minister consider that the appointment of a returning officer is an act of partisanship?

Mr. Green: It certainly was in this case. I do not believe there has ever been a government take over in Canada where there has been so little political partisanship shown towards the civil service.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Green: I would inform the hon. member that there have been some very provocative actions which in other days would have called for pretty drastic action, but this government has leaned over backwards to be non-partisan in its dealings with civil servants, and I am sure the people of Canada as a whole clearly understand that that has been the attitude of the government.

Mr. Chevrier: Mr. Chairman, I was not trying to be provocative at all. On the contrary, I raised this question in the most casual

manner I could, but I believe the house is entitled to know, if the minister can tell us, whether or not any of these men have been severed from their employment for that reason. He did mention the case of the returning officer and in order to indicate to him and to the house that I have no intention of being provocative I say to him now that if it is not possible for him to give the information at this moment, I would be quite happy if he gives it to me next week or even afterwards. I am not pressing for an answer immediately but I think not only this house but the public generally will want to know and will want to be reassured of what the minister has just said, that the government is doing a good job with reference to the employees under its jurisdiction. If it is doing that job, fine, and I will be the first to commend the government, but I would like the minister to be a little more specific. He has been very courteous in his reply but has really shelved the issue. I believe we are entitled to a little more than that and if he feels after consideration in the week to come that the reply should be made at a later time I am perfectly happy. However, I feel the house should know what is the position.

Mr. Green: I think it would not be in the best interests of the service or of the Commons to precipitate a debate on a question of this kind. If it is to be debated then facts will have to be brought out and arguments made as to this man and that man having participated and what he did and so on and so forth. I do not think it would serve any useful purpose whatsoever to get into a wrangle of that kind. The change of government has been made after a period of 22 years when, as the hon. member himself knows very well, active supporters of his own party were given positions in the civil service.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Green: Twenty-two years with one party in power, and when thousands—

Mr. Chevrier: I do not know of any who were discharged.

Mr. Green: Thousands of employees were appointed by that government and there were many cases where supporters of opposition parties were unable to get work or were dismissed.

Mr. McIlraith: Oh, oh. Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Green: Don't you get started. I do not believe it is in the best interests of the country to open up this subject. We believe in the merit system for the civil service and our actions during the last year have shown that we have faith in that service. We intend