

Merit and carefully read the remarks made by the Commissioners.

I will not take the time of the House to read all that, but I see in that report 12 or 13 very specific recommendations as to how to implement that recommendation.

It was simply a matter of allowing federal public servants, those who are not employed in an advisory or counselling capacity, or who have no responsibility for developing specific Government policies, all those who are at the administrative services or support level, those in the professional groups, of allowing those people to fully participate in the election process. This is only fair in my view. Of course, and here I may disagree with the Hon. Member for Regina West, senior executives, people who directly advise the Government, should be excluded in my view, from all levels of the political process.

Let us not be mistaken about that. One cannot, on one hand, give professional political advice to a Government and, on the other, divorce oneself from that context and criticize, even when one is at home, at work or among relatives. In my opinion, it is imperative to restructure that right or those arrangements so that public servants who are not expected to give political advice to the Government be free to participate and enjoy full freedom. However, if they have a political role to play in the full meaning of the word—give advice, make assessments and draft policies—I think they should not be allowed to voice criticism and be politically active because there might be a conflict of interests, obviously.

The recommendation of the D'Avignon committee or commission was echoed by the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada which, in a brief entitled "Parliamentary Dialogue 1984", made recommendations of its own. Only three of those relate to this issue, and I think it might be a good idea to put them on the record of this House. I quote from this "Parliamentary Dialogue 1984":

We recommend that a special parliamentary committee be struck to draft legislation with the following objectives:

1. Grant full political rights to public servants (in line with the D'Avignon committee recommendations).
2. Indicate to all public servants, in clear and specific terms, to what extent they are allowed to be politically active, regardless of the category to which they belong, according to the D'Avignon report.

And I think that the third recommendation is just as important, Mr. Speaker:

3. Extend full freedom of expression to public servants so that they may speak openly on public issues, whether or not such issues directly concern the Government.

I have some reservations about this one, but I quite agree with the first two recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, the scope of the Bill under consideration is clear enough and, as I said earlier, it might be referred to a parliamentary committee for further study. At the end of my remarks, I may have a suggestion to that effect to help Hon.

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Members, or to expedite the process and make it possible to refer this Bill to a committee.

● (1620)

[English]

Earlier this week, Mr. Speaker, I asked the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. de Cotret) about another matter of vital importance to public servants. It was, of course, the very serious problem of classification standards. In his answer, the Minister touched on the six issues he was negotiating with the public service staff associations. Among those issues was indeed political participation. He did not say that in the House but outside the House, and it was reported by the media, the radio in particular, yesterday morning on *CBO Morning*. Although I asked the question today, the Minister was not in the House, unfortunately, and I got an answer from the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson). But I am not satisfied with the answers I was getting to my inquiries, which were very clear. Evidently the Minister of Finance is not able to give me much specific information as to what exactly is being negotiated. Nevertheless, I find it gratifying and somewhat—

Mr. Jepson: It might be a problem of understanding.

Mr. Gauthier: What was that remark?

Nevertheless, I find it gratifying that the President of the Treasury Board is negotiating the subject matter with the staff associations and, in his own words, is making very interesting progress on all six issues. I guess that means we have an agreement forthcoming on the important question of political participation, as well as that of the dental plan, classification standards and other issues.

To my amazement the staff associations had not heard of these encouraging statements or of the progress because they believed the negotiations were taking place in camera. Since the Minister was so forthcoming to me on Monday in telling me that he was very enthusiastic and encouraged by these developments with the unions, I say quite candidly that they were quite pleased with this progress, and they said so publicly on radio yesterday morning. Indeed, they think now that the Minister has agreed to their requirements and that shortly he will make public the agreement on these six difficult and, I think, important issues. No details have been given of the nature of what has been agreed to, but even the staff associations, as I am sure all Members in the House, will appreciate the Minister's coming to the House and making a statement clarifying his Government's position.

Surprised? Yes, many of those issues are complex. Classification is a very complex issue, as are political rights in their solution. I only hope that the Minister will see fit to bring the Parliament of Canada into the process of studying whatever proposal he has elaborated which he will be offering to the staff associations for negotiation. I say that advisedly because I think we would like to know about the dental plan and the cost of these things. We would like to know exactly what is in the offing for our public servants.