

Compensation

country. It would concern me very much if Air Canada, for instance, could not compete in the marketplace for the skills and talent required to give the people the best service available.

Mr. Gillies: That is why you hired Bryce Mackasey.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Johnston (Westmount): I am glad to see hon. members have a sense of humour. I detected an ambiguity in the remarks of the hon. member. Are we being asked to increase the level of remuneration of legislators in this country, specifically of the Prime Minister, since that is to be the touchstone used to determine maximum compensation to be paid elsewhere? Or are we being asked to roll back the remuneration paid to senior civil servants, presidents of Crown corporations and so on? I gather from the comments made by the hon. member that it is the latter.

I personally favour the hon. gentleman's view because the people who are involved in the political process are not essentially seeking remuneration. As the hon. gentleman knows very well, "Man does not live by bread alone", and nothing could be truer of the representatives of the people involved in the legislative process. I would suggest, however, when we turn to the people who are serving as employees of government agencies and Crown corporations, that this is not the case. The hon. member is seeking a form of wage parity which does not accord with what I understand to be a classical philosophy of the Conservative party, one to which I happen to subscribe myself, namely that we are not to be envious of what is paid to others, of what is paid to members of the public service.

I share the view of the Auditor General, expressed some weeks ago, that we should be prepared to remunerate the public servants of this country by paying the highest wages required to obtain the best possible people, while at the same time we should retain the right to terminate those services in the manner adopted by the private sector. I have no doubt that, notwithstanding the argument put forward by the hon. member, deputy ministers and senior officials in Crown corporations and government agencies discharge responsibilities which in many instances are as great as those undertaken in the private sector, sometimes greater.

The hon. gentleman made the point that officials in the public service wear only one hat—the spending hat—whereas in the private sector they have responsibility both for spending and for raising money. I do not think the analogy holds. I believe there are many officials of major corporations whose roles are almost identical to those of the deputy ministers of many of our departments. I believe that at the top level of responsibility our public servants are probably underpaid, not overpaid as the hon. member suggests. It may be that adjustments ought to be made elsewhere in the public service, but they should not affect senior public servants nor should they affect presidents and senior executive officers of Crown corporations.

[Mr. Johnston (Westmount).]

I return to my view that if this motion were adopted we would not be able to attract necessary skills into the public service.

Mr. Gillies: Let's try it.

Mr. Johnston (Westmount): The hon. member says, "Let's try it", but I am personally not prepared to take the chance of losing some of the most able people in the country on this issue of remuneration. I think the Canadian people are prepared to pay according to responsibility assumed.

● (1722)

The hon. member has drawn upon the American experience, but the American experience, fortunately or unfortunately—and there are arguments both ways—is quite unlike our own in that policymakers in the United States change, by and large, with change in the administration. As we know, federal administrations in the United States change every four years. The difference is that people who assume the roles of undersecretaries, assistant undersecretaries and others in terms of the policymaking apparatus in the United States are essentially servants of the people during limited periods of time. It is a responsibility and an honour to take such positions, but these people are basically private sector people who return to the private sector at the end of a given four-year period. Some of them take leaves of absences from universities, businesses and so forth. In fact, in many respects I suggest that that aspect of the U.S. system is healthy because there is a constant interchange between private sector and public sector personnel due to this process.

There are very few major law firms, investment houses or corporations in the United States which do not have among their ranks some people who have served government in senior capacities in one or more administrations. Unfortunately—and I say "unfortunately" because our system as it now operates is not compatible with that kind of change—we have basically a permanent civil service in this country. There are great advantages and disadvantages to our system, but I suggest that in the absence of undertaking very fundamental reforms in the entire government apparatus in Canada it would be virtually impossible to adopt this motion at this time. It would have a severe impact and the civil service would experience severe dislocation, not to speak of Crown corporations and Crown agencies.

Hence I am drawn to the conclusion that as much as I agree with the motives which obviously underlie this motion, I cannot accept it as being a reasonable means of accomplishing the objectives the hon. member for Don Valley wishes to accomplish.

I say in conclusion that we must never forget the role of the elected representative of the people, the role which each of us in this chamber sees as being very distinct from that of the public servant. There is no reason to suggest that if any limitation is to be placed upon the remuneration paid to public servants, it should take the form of wage parity with the people