

*Adjournment Debate*PUBLIC SERVICE—REDUCTION OF PERSONNEL—EFFECT ON
SERVICE TO PUBLIC

● (2212)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa-Vanier): Mr. Speaker, on February 7, 1978, the Leader of the Official Opposition in a speech to the Junior Chamber of Commerce in Toronto proudly announced a startling policy concerning the personnel of the Public Service of Canada. It will be remembered that Mr. Clark announced that a Progressive Conservative government would enforce an absolute freeze on the hiring of civil servants and that his objective would be to reduce the Public Service of Canada by at least 60,000 jobs in the next three years by not replacing employees leaving their jobs for the many reasons we know, namely retirement, death, departures, and so on.

That freeze coupled with a major cutback are certainly drastic measures, Mr. Speaker, designed to boost the popularity of the Progressive Conservative party by rejecting the odious nature of their economic measures on the public sector and more particularly civil servants. So in the few minutes I have I will be trying to show the danger of such a proposal and caution those who for partisan purposes would like to have Canadian taxpayers believe that if they were in power they would know how to show leadership and come down hard on the backs of federal civil servants by arbitrarily reducing their numbers.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot accept that concept of political machiavelism that the end justifies the means. They are not telling the whole truth when they are spreading this dangerous myth that by reducing the number of government employees through an absolute freeze and not replacing those who resign they will come up with savings big enough to finance a major reduction leading to substantial cuts in taxes. That is just not true.

Among the many questions which will need to be asked and which we are entitled to have answered, the leader of the Progressive Conservative party will have to say which government services will be cut. Does he have in mind the inspectors of the Department of Labour, or perhaps the scientists at the Department of Environment, or even worse, the professional analysts of the Department of Regional Economic Expansion? He will have to tell us which services will be discontinued or reduced. If he is suggesting he is thinking in terms of better manpower utilization, I would remind him that since 1975 there has been a significant decrease in the number of employees, and government managers are now working with a reduced staff that must meet the challenge and go on serving the Canadian people despite their reduced numbers. Moreover, it should be remembered that there is a competitive private sector, and if the workload of federal civil servants keeps growing without pay increases, they may prefer to find better jobs in the private sector. The impact would create problems at

the hiring end, with the danger eventually of depriving the public service of competent and hardworking personnel.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, if the Progressive Conservative leader came to power, does he want us to believe he can govern this country without government programs? Will such a potential government be a janitorial government leaving to the private sector the leadership in ideas and services in the eighties, or will they simply be the foreman of the status quo? That government will certainly wish to leave their mark and that of important ministers, put forward government programs, perhaps improve and even better explain, research, expand with the help of civil servants the whole range of existing services, and indeed create new ones.

It is intriguing at this point, at this time of serious disputes between labour and employers, to hear the opposition leader suggest he would replace the right to strike in the public service by a tribunal empowered to deal with disputes bearing on the public interest, his so-called Public Interest Disputes Tribunal which he would charge with solving disputes between labour and management. Is he proposing an agency without civil servants, one administered by computers?

When Mr. Clark talks about increasing employment counselling services to make it easier for the unemployed to find a job, is he trying to suggest that he will not hire qualified counselling personnel to provide this essential service? And finally, when he speaks about taking away the right to strike of federal public servants, is Mr. Clark suggesting that in his relations with federal employee unions, these workers will remain silent and not take part in the debate? This is obviously a proposal that can only incite to illegality, Mr. Speaker, because taking away the right to strike of federal public servants will not solve normal conflicts between employees and employer.

I understand, Mr. Speaker, that as serious and fraught with consequences as these issues may be, they can be considered hypothetical because, in my opinion, even if the Progressive Conservatives came to power they could not implement such a disastrous policy. An analysis of both proposals, that is the freeze and the non-replacement of public servants, shows the ambiguity and the cynicism of the Progressive Conservative leader since he did not explain to the Canadian people how he would implement such a policy. Mr. Clark speaks about the federal bureaucracy. We should know if this definition includes all government services and if it covers not only the employees under the jurisdiction of the Treasury Board, but also all others under federal jurisdiction, that is those employed by Crown corporations such as Air Canada which are responsible to the federal government.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I submit—and I asked the minister about this in the House last week—that it is impossible to administer Canada and provide Canadians with the services to which they are entitled under the laws passed by this House if there is a complete freeze of hiring in the public service and an