GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

PARLIAMENTARY EMPLOYMENT AND STAFF RELATIONS ACT

MEASURE TO ENACT

The House resumed from Friday, November 1, consideration of the motion of Mr. Hnatyshyn that Bill C-45, and Act respecting employment and employer and employee relations in the Senate and House of Commons, be read the second time and referred to a legislative committee.

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina West): Mr. Speaker, before my time starts, could the Chair or the Clerk tell me how much time I have remaining? I did not get a reading on Friday.

Mr. Speaker: I am informed that the Hon. Member has 10 minutes left in his speech under daylight or eastern standard time.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Now, what is the good news?

Mr. Benjamin: Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to continue my remarks on what I was talking about last Friday, the general principle of the rights of employees on Parliament Hill in terms of collective bargaining, negotiations, right to strike and all those things entrenched in the laws of Canada and the provinces, even in the by-laws of municipalities, which are sort of taken for granted. There are large numbers, including those employed on Parliament Hill and its environs, who do not have those rights, and the Government is seeking ways to grant at least part of those rights.

The right to bargain not only concerns hours of work, rates of pay, holidays and so on. It also concerns the conditions of employment in the workplace. There have been far too many examples around here, since I came here, beginning in October, 1968, where, at the whim of a supervisor or someone at the lower or middle management level, people who had been working here for some period of time were left out when it came to assignments, job classifications, transfers or applications for promotion. They seem to have been left in limbo or left to the whims of those who were their immediate or top managers.

I should like to refer to an example of this. A senior technical position becomes vacant around here, several employees inquire about a competition being held, and none is held. However, the husband of a manager in another department of the same service is brought in to fill the position on a temporary basis. Several months later, a competition is held. Then, the now-experienced husband in that position enters the competition and is hired permanently, and the appeals of the other employees are denied. No self-respecting employer anywhere else would ever countenance that sort of accidental or "left to the whim of" procedure, which you, Mr. Speaker, or I or the Minister in charge would never even hear about, let alone know about. None of us, as Members, would countenance that treatment of staff in our own offices, let alone employees of the House of Commons.

Another example would be that of several employees in a support service who hold supervisory positions on an acting basis. Some could have held these positions from two years to seven years respectively, and they are informed that they have been downgraded four levels and that their salaries will be reduced from $21,000 to $17,000. However, during the same period, other working supervisors are hired for the same service without any competition process. Again internal appeals are denied.

I have only referred to two examples of some 14 which I have in my possession. I have no doubt that my colleagues on all sides of the House have other examples. It is one of the rights which is presently being denied employees of the Parliament of Canada, a right which the House has to instate for them. The matters of who gets what jobs, who gets transferred and how the process is carried out must be given to the employees to have in a collective agreement so that they may bargain about them in an orderly manner. This must be done so that someone does not hire someone else's brother-in-law simply because it is easy to lay off some people and not call back others when they have no recourse. That is a denial of fundamental justice let alone the laws that apply to others regarding collective bargaining and conditions of employment.

• (1650)

Again I must cite the experience of my own province as an example. In the Province of Saskatchewan, all three political Parties have been in power and employees have had the right of collective agreement since 1947. While there have been disputes, strikes and disagreements, those would not represent more than 2 per cent or 3 per cent of the difficulties encountered. In the overwhelming majority of instances, agreement has been reached through bargaining. Agreements were negotiated for employees of every Department and for every employee, whether it be a technical, professional or service employee, year after year for almost 40 years. There were some occasions on which Crown corporation employees went out on strike. There were some occasions on which members of the Public Service worked to rule. By the way, I always figure that working to rule is a darn good tactic when there is a disagreement with an employer. When employees work to the rules the employer has laid down, they can grind the place to a halt. That that can occur in both the private and public sector and has to tell us about some of the rules that are put down by some employers.

I think the Government is only dipping its feet into this matter. It wants Hill employees to appear to be equal to the workers in the other sectors of the Public Service and the private sector. However, these employees will not be quite as equal as others. Others will be more equal, but the Government wants to have at least the appearance of equality.

I admit that this Bill makes some positive moves toward making these long withheld rights available to Hill employees. Frankly, though, I think this Government and previous