

Private Members' Business

There is a process for Public Service reform under way. I fully expect that the government, if it really wants it to succeed, will open up that process to consultation with the employees and their unions and that an idea like this is certainly something that could be considered in that process but should not be brought into this House without consultation with the unions and in isolation from all the other reform measures that are now under consideration.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): The hon. member for Matapédia—Matane.

Mr. Jean-Luc Joncas (Matapédia—Matane): Mr. Speaker, after listening with care to my colleagues, it is with mixed feelings that I take part in the debate on Bill C-225. As you know, Mr. Speaker, this bill provides for the priority access of our staff to Public Service positions. Like all members of this House, I am extremely grateful to the people who work for me and for my colleagues. It is perfectly legitimate to be concerned with issues such as our staff's job safety and opportunities for advancement. They deserve it. They are loyal collaborators who are familiar with the business of Parliament as well as with the various Departments and the machinery of government.

They devote a lot of time and energy to satisfy our needs. For the most part, they do not have a fixed schedule. They are available at any time of day, often very early in the morning and late at night, and even during the weekends. Not many people are so fortunate, Mr. Speaker, as to have such dedicated collaborators.

I can say without exaggeration that we could not do all our work if it were not for them. They provide us with the help, information and professional services we need to fulfill our demanding tasks as parliamentarians and politicians. Without them, we must recognize it, Mr. Speaker, we would often be lost.

We all know that our staff is as loyal and dedicated as we are when it comes to serving our country.

The purpose of Bill C-225 we are dealing with today is to amend the Public Service Employment Act to provide equitable treatment to the staff of Members of the House of Commons by according them a priority consideration to be appointed without competition provided

they had been Civil Service employees immediately before, or had qualified for appointment to the Public Service, or had been employed for at least three years in the office of a Member of the House of Commons.

Over the past few years, Mr. Speaker, in order to streamline its expenses, the Government laid off some 1 000 Public Service employees. Thanks to its Work Force Adjustment policy, the Government was able to re-hire a large number of employees declared redundant thanks to the co-operation of the unions and the efforts of the Public Service to minimize the impact of these cuts.

Merit has always been a cornerstone of all appointments to the Public Service. Over the years, however, the merit principle changed to take into account other criteria such as efficiency, equal employment opportunity, a sense of fairness and awareness within the Canadian public.

Mr. Speaker, I feel it is essential to maintain a Public Service which is not only politically neutral, but which appears to be politically neutral to most Canadian men and women as well as civil servants generally, and not motivated by partisan or other types of political considerations. For nearly a century, I think we have managed to have a Public Service that is neutral and we must take all necessary steps to ensure that it remains neutral.

In my opinion, a Public Service which is politically neutral should be protected from any political interference. Such political scientists as Kenneth Kernaghan have identified the major characteristics of a classic model non partisan and neutral Public Service. In this context, this political scientist gave us the following theoretical model: First of all, the policymaker and the policy should be distinct from the Civil Service. It is the responsibility of politicians and their associates to make political decisions and that of civil servants to implement them.

Second, the appointment and promotion of staff should be based on the merit principle and not on party affiliation or contribution.

Third, public service employees should not indulge in any partisan politics.

Fourth, public service employees should not reveal publically their personal opinion concerning the policies of the Government or its administration.