

Government Orders

sion, was very much sacred. We are very concerned about this section of the bill.

The addition of this clause to the Public Service Employment Act will allow the government and managers to circumvent the merit principle I have talked about. The result will be a less competent Public Service, more and more dependent on political favouritism. Surely as we move toward the year 2000 we do not want to find a Public Service that is more dependent on political favouritism.

• (1630)

In committee, the government and the Public Service Commission argued that it needed this clause to deal with special circumstances, circumstances that were defined in regulations. But regulations do not receive the kind of scrutiny that a bill does in this Parliament, and so we asked why cannot the government make specific those circumstances where the principle of relative merit would not apply? Why can that not be in this bill? Why give such far-ranging powers to an agency that has demonstrated it is incapable of protecting the merit principle and safeguarding the Public Service from patronage, nepotism and political whim?

Motion No. 15 seeks to eliminate the addition of this concept to the application of the merit principle. The reason to eliminate it is very simple: the government and witnesses before the legislative committee could not come up with anything other than "trust us, we need this flexibility", but only hinted to us how this provision would actually be applied.

In light of such vagueness, this House should not be prepared to grant the government or the Public Service Commission *carte blanche* to erode the merit principle.

I would ask that Motion No. 15 be supported as well as Motion No. 18, which seeks to clarify the circumstances in which the commission may ignore the principle of relative merit. If there is a need to use the principle of standard of competence, then this need should be spelled out in the legislation if abuse of the system is to be avoided.

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre): Madam Speaker, I support most of the amendments introduced by my colleague from Ottawa West because they are fair amendments. We make no bones about it as the majority of public servants live in the national capital region and

we know them because we work with them. I think every member of Parliament also deals on a daily basis with members of the Public Service and they know the high calibre of the service they receive. I would say without hesitation that we have one of the finest Public Services anywhere in the world.

These motions call on the government not to abandon the merit principle. It means that we are urging the government not to open the door to patronage. We call on the government to not proceed with the deployment of public servants without any kind of safeguard because we know that would not be in the best interests of the public servant, nor in the best interests of the government itself.

When we speak out against contracting out without adequate accountability, it is because we want to make sure that the government as well as the country gets a good return on its investment. We do not want to end up contracting out a job which in the end will have to be done over once the contract has been completed. So we need some sort of cost analysis.

When we talk about the excessive use of regulation, simply put it is because we want to see a streamlined Public Service without too much complication, without too much regulation. We want to see more flexibility in the hands of management as well as in the hands of the public servants themselves.

When we talk about accountability, it is simply that we believe accountability would increase flexibility within the public service.

When we talk about collective bargaining we are talking about a partnership between the public servant and their employers.

I do not see that any of the amendments which my colleague from Ottawa West has introduced in the House are done in bad faith; in fact, they were done in order to improve the Public Service, in order to streamline many of the complications that exist within the Public Service.

One segment in one of the amendments deals with the question of casuals. As the House probably knows, the government has gone on a rampage hiring casuals. Many of my constituents are thankful to have jobs, even though many of these are short-term positions. I want the government to know that by its actions it is creating nightmares for families in my constituency.