

*Private Members' Business*

After three years, an employee in the Public Service of Canada is automatically granted permanent status. So why should the same treatment not be given to the staff of parliamentarians? It seems to me this would make it easier for us to hire better qualified people who would feel more secure and work harder still. In short, that would enhance the quality of our own work as members.

Keep in mind that our employees have family responsibilities just like we do. They have to earn a living and pay monthly bills as we do. Before deciding to work for a member or seek employment elsewhere they have to take a number of factors into account, such as how much they will be paid, how secure their job will be and what happen if they can no longer work for this or that member as a result of an electoral defeat or some other event. Let us be frank about it, these employees are at our mercy. It is very easy for any member to sack an employee, for he or she can be laid off practically overnight with little or no recourse.

In the name of fairness and equity, Mr. Speaker, I support Bill C-25.

• (1740)

I am sure that if all members of the House were to consider the matter very carefully they would have to reach the same conclusion.

If we expect our employees to be dedicated, industrious and fully supportive, and when the time comes to hire new staff and we want to get the best available, Mr. Speaker, we will have to offer them a minimum of security. The money they earn is not all that much! They certainly cannot expect to become rich after a few years, let alone retire without a worry in the world.

But at least, Mr. Speaker, if I may put it that way, we should have the decency and compassion to make sure that they can look further than the next electoral campaign. The employee should at least know for sure that if his boss is defeated or fires him—again that is another possibility—he will not be left pounding the pavement, he will have something else to do. He should be safe in the knowledge that he can find employment in a related field, because the work they do for members is similar to yet different from the duties of public servants.

A moment ago I heard one of my colleagues say that it is unfair because our employees do not have to go

through competitions or screenings and write exams. Of course they do. Mr. Speaker! The screening is done by the member. Before hiring a prospective employee, the member examines his work credentials and his background. Otherwise would it not be like saying the member lacks judgment? That is what it boils down to! The hon. member said that he could not see that because these employees were not administered exams like the others to evaluate their skills. That is to say that he cannot be the judge of that because he is the one who did the hiring.

It seems a little contradictory to me, Mr. Speaker. Why disagree if we consider ourselves as intelligent—I think we are—and fair employers! So, the test already took place, at the time the member decided to hire the employee. Therefore, the employee who passed the test successfully then will not be less intelligent the day he or she is laid-off.

There is another point to consider, Mr. Speaker, and it is that these employees, our employees, share our emotions. Sometimes, they work 40 or 45 hours a week, although they are paid for 30. I know for a fact that my employees are still at work as we speak, Mr. Speaker, while civil servants went home an hour or two ago. Why not recognize the contribution they are making to our country?

Mr. Speaker, the fact that a bill was introduced by the government or by an opposition member should be irrelevant. We should set aside partisanship and consider this bill on its merits instead of rejecting it on the sole ground that it was introduced by an opposition member. That would be the equitable way of dealing with it, Mr. Speaker.

I wish therefore to propose a small amendment, if I may. I know that perfection is impossible and that this bill is not perfect, but I believe the following amendment—and it will be the only one—is relevant. I am against increasing government expenditures when a number of civil servants are already being paid to do nothing. These resources should be used before hiring people from our offices. With this small amendment, the bill would be perfectly satisfactory to me. In closing, I invite my colleagues to support this bill in the name of fairness.