

Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act

Members who are in fear of Parliament Hill being held hostage by those employees, whom I believe should be granted full rights, to examine the historical facts to see whether or not that is really the nature of the people who are asking that their rights be granted through a different version of Bill C-45.

We should always be cognizant of the fact that the eyes of the country are always on us and that the way we treat our employees and operate this place sets an example for many other institutions and employers across the country. If we as elected representatives seek to make this an elitist institution, giving ourselves special privileges or guarantees by denying the rights of our employees, I suggest that Canadians will not judge this institution kindly.

Hopefully the legislative committee will sit in a non-partisan and non-adversarial atmosphere. Therefore, I add my voice to those who ask members of that committee to make a considered judgment, and ask themselves whether we have the right to act as an elitist group of commissars and deny the employees of Parliament Hill the full rights and protections to which they are entitled as citizens of this country and employees of the Government of Canada.

Mr. John Parry (Kenora—Rainy River): Mr. Speaker, in rising to address Bill C-45 today I do so with no great enthusiasm, because this pale apology for the conferral of rights on the employees of Parliament Hill does the Government no credit. If passed, it will do this Parliament no credit.

I would like to quote the words of Stanley Knowles 19 years ago when he was talking to a special committee. He said:

Therefore, there has been a rule up here on the Hill that the Civil Service Commission stays out except for the odd bit of advice and for statistics to be used for comparative purposes. But it strikes me that by leaving out of this Bill and out of all other Bills any reference to parliamentary staff, we are in effect making no statutory provisions with respect to the rights of employees on Parliament Hill.

We see that situation being repeated today. Far from making statutory provisions for rights, Bill C-45 merely institutionalizes what would be reasonable practice in a traditional master-servant environment. It really has very little to do with collective bargaining rights. I fear that we may be seeing some sort of paradigm for the sort of labour legislation that the Government would like to apply across a whole range of industrial and civil service sectors.

The so-called rights that are provided in Bill C-45 fall far short of free collective bargaining rights within the normal understanding of those terms. They fall far short of the protection that is necessary for workers in any organized situation. They fall far short of the procedures which are necessary if grievances or disagreements are to be addressed frankly and sincerely, and they fall far short of what is necessary if they are to be fairly resolved.

Much has been said about Parliament's status. Parliament is the highest court of the land. After all, privilege is something that is exercised by Parliament and defined by Parliament. However, as Members on this side of the House have said,

with those high powers and that high authority goes a higher responsibility. This, the highest court in the land, should be acting not only as the highest authority but also as the highest example. How better to show that high example than in the way in which Parliament and the House of Commons deals with parliamentary and House of Commons employees?

• (1130)

I believe that, far from being the shadow of collective bargaining legislation, a Bill to regulate relations between the employees of Parliament and Parliament itself should be a model, a paradigm, for the sort of industrial labour relations we would like to see throughout this country. What do we have instead? We have a Bill which essentially imposes a mere staff association type of environment on the employees of the House of Commons and of the Library of Parliament. We have the sort of loose, limp set-up whereby certain things will be able to be taken to management, and certain things will be subject to the collective bargaining process. But what is more noteworthy is what is left out, which is what is generally understood to be the rights of workers in collective bargaining situations.

There is a saying that, "In order for the people to trust the Government, the Government must trust the people". That I think applies very well to the situation before us with Bill C-45. The evidence suggests to me that those who drafted Bill C-45 are not seeking to extend collective bargaining rights to Parliament Hill in the true sense, but are seeking rather to give some minimal concessions, to throw some sops before the legitimate demands of the employees in order to diffuse the political pressure which the Government and the administration are feeling. It is an adaptation of earlier versions of the Public Service Staff Relations Act, and as such it is very plainly a throw-back to an era we should be glad has gone by. The results will be statutory protection and traditional management prerogatives which cannot be claimed as necessary either to preserve the supremacy of Parliament or the merit principle. The people who have been organizing have provided a long list of the type of abuses which could continue under Bill C-45 and which this legislation does not really address.

Privilege, of course, is something which has to be considered very fairly. Privilege, after all, is an institution and a convention which is framed for specific purposes. I challenge the Government to draw the logical lines of connection between privilege and what rights in fact are being taken away from Parliamentary employees. Sir David Lidderdale defines privilege as:

—the sum of rights exceeding those rights of common citizens enjoyed by each House of Parliament collectively, by the Supreme Court, and by the individual members of the legislatures or judiciary that are necessary for the performance of their functions. Privilege is a traditional convention, not precisely defined, that like many traditions, changes with the passage of time.

We are not, fortunately, today facing the sort of pressure on Parliament that privilege was originally framed to insulate against. We are not likely to see a monarch accompanied by a file of armed infantry come to Parliament and attempt to