

French nor English language training is available to the assistants on the staff of members of Parliament, but it is available to all other House of Commons personnel. They vetoed a Standing Order 43 motion to have this discrimination looked into just the other day. I would ask the minister to take another hard look at this with a view to allowing members' staffs take advantage of the language training programs available. I wonder how a party that has not been able to implement its own policies in the past will do so in the future? Is this minister going to have any more success at fostering or developing Canadian culture?

Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I might call it ten o'clock before I get to another subject I wish to cover.

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[*Translation*]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 40 deemed to have been moved.

● (2200)

[*English*]

PUBLIC SERVICE—REHIRING OF LAID-OFF PERSONNEL

Hon. Walter Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that you are in the chair, sir, because you have a constituency responsibility which is parallel to mine, and that is the subject matter on which I want to address this House this evening.

There will always be reorganizations within the Government of Canada. As a result of those reorganizations many well-trained professionals, clerks and others within the public service, will find their careers interrupted through lay-off, being declared redundant, being put on priority lists, etc. etc. All of these events create uncertainty for families and great difficulties with devastating sacrifices that can only be experienced to be understood. Throughout the period of time that I have been a member of Parliament, I have seen many people in that position, and there is nothing more distressing than the feeling of hopelessness that they bring with them to my office.

The Public Service Commission has recognized the importance of providing some hope to public servants through the work of Ken Sinclair. There have been some astonishing success stories when a person has been found redundant and that same person finds a spot somewhere else. But as good as the existing programs are, they lack one essential ingredient for success. That ingredient is retraining.

During the course of the Clark government the process of devising a scheme began, but we have heard very little from the government from retraining of public servants since the

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last election. That is why I asked the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Johnston) the following question:

—When is the President of the Treasury Board going to make announcements with respect to the retraining programs for public servants which were promised during the course of the election and about which he has been strangely silent since the election?

There has not been an answer since that question was asked. The minister's answer at that time was:

—I take exception to any suggestion that I have been silent. In fact, I discussed with the hon. gentleman the importance we attach to training and to retraining.

That is correct, he did. He went on to say:

We are, I hope, bringing forward some significant programs in this regard, and I hope to be able to make announcements in the House in the very near future. I shall be delighted to discuss further with the hon. gentleman some of his ideas which sometimes, I must say with respect, are quite good.

I appreciate the flattery. I am available to help in this program as I am sure you are, Mr. Speaker. I believe there is a great opportunity for the public sector to provide leadership to business and industry with respect to retraining. Aside from the maintenance of an experienced public service, I think it is important that the government, as an employer, show a concern for the human side as well.

In February, 1980, the government of which I was a member took a quantum leap forward in that regard. The Treasury Board announced a policy of no lay-off protection which read as follows:

Our policy, that all surplus employees would be offered an alternative employment opportunity, was designed to ensure that there would be no lay-offs solely to achieve reductions. From time to time, there are a number of situations in the public service where positions have been declared surplus for reasons which are not directly related to specific plans for more efficient government. These could result from changes in the work load of programs, from re-organization of work or other internal management changes, as well as from the normal phasing out of some programs. It is the government's policy that employees in these situations would also be covered by the no lay-off policy and would be offered an alternative employment opportunity.

The underpinning for this proposal in terms of public interest and in terms of public servants must be the institution of retraining programs. That policy was made dependent upon retraining programs that the government of which I was a member was developing within the Public Service of Canada to assist public servants to prepare for new employment opportunities. The same obligation rests with this government, and public servants are watching and waiting for some action.

I believe that the government should continue and improve upon the initiatives which my government began. I have some suggestions, and I am sure there are others. A public service-wide retraining program should be announced quickly. It should encompass public servants not yet placed who want to work in the public service and who were laid off as the result of the Trudeau government cutbacks of August 1, 1978, and those public servants should remain eligible and continue on an extended priority list.

● (2205)

The government should use its influence with Crown agencies to ensure that those employees who are laid off, and who