

Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex—Windsor): Mr. Speaker, the Bill before us today has a long history. The background to this Bill should persuade Members of the House to reject it and request the Government to consult fully with the employees on the Hill to work out a more satisfactory agreement between the Government and those who serve us on Parliament Hill. After all, it is here in Ottawa, in our relations with the staff who serve us in the House of Commons, that we should have model legislation that reflects a clear-cut, open agreement so that the employees do not feel they have been tricked, treated unfairly or left out of the consultation process.

I believe it is a sad day when the Government introduces a Bill which a majority of the employees of this Parliament have clearly rejected. It indicates that the Government has not fulfilled its commitment to make consultation honest and meaningful to people. I have seen the Government's failure to consult in many areas, since its 211 members came to power. I saw it in the case of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) when the effort to consult with business, labour and other groups did not lead to some kind of new initiative or agreement that was a step forward for the Government, but to a sense of betrayal on the part of those who felt that they had entered into the consultation process honestly. Ultimately, they felt they had not been listened to honestly. They found that consultation did not mean having a real input. They did not necessarily want to directly or comprehensively shape policy, but at least have some influence on policy.

The Government, in the middle of its mandate, faces questions about what it will do in the future. Its inability to meet the expectations of Canadians throughout the country with respect to consultation and the real meaning of consultation will be its greatest failure and will cost it dearly. This Bill demonstrates that failure. The employees who serve Members of Parliament and the Senate have jobs in which they serve the country. These jobs are often interesting but very demanding and often force them to work long hours under difficult conditions. The relations between us, as employers and those people who work here should be a model of decent, civilized employer-employee relations.

Workers on the Hill have been engaged in a long-term effort to organize themselves collectively. This led to a majority of Hill employees being able to go before the Canada Labour Relations Board in 1983 with a request to become regular unionized employees under the Canada Labour Code itself. Personally, I believe that the right to collective bargaining is fundamental in this country. As the employers of these Parliament Hill employees, we should have celebrated the fact that these workers sought to exercise that right. We should respond by trying to work out an agreement under the Canada Labour Code.

The Government saw it otherwise. It decided that this represented some kind of threat to established practices. Perhaps it was a threat to a system of internal patronage that had ruled for many years. Perhaps it was a threat to the ongoing work of Parliament during a time when the country

needed it to function. Therefore, instead of accepting that request for certification, the Government introduced Bill C-45 which attempts to provide a supposed form of bargaining rights for employees. In practice, however, it creates a situation so restricted and distorted that these workers will not really have the basic rights to which any employee in the country should be entitled.

● (1240)

Let me give some examples of the kinds of rights which any employee should have and which employees under this Bill will not have. First, they should have the right to negotiate with respect to classification of positions and assignment of duties. In Windsor, where I come from, to even think that a contract negotiation could somehow have validity without the workers being able to discuss classification of positions and assignment of duties is laughable. There is not a union member in all of my community who would see this as a valid piece of labour legislation if that basic right is left out. The same is true with respect to negotiation over staffing. If it is not possible for workers to at least negotiate potential arrangements which have to do with job appointments, appraisals, promotions, demotions and transfers, and if they cannot even negotiate about provisions for lay-offs, what kind of legislation is that? It is a lot closer to sham than it is to real bargaining legislation.

Perhaps most crucial, as I look at this Bill, is that there is not even provision for workers to put into their negotiation process the question of grievance procedures. They cannot even negotiate over what the grievance procedures are to be. Of all the basic rights which any worker should expect, regardless of whether they are in the private or public sector, their right to negotiate over grievance procedures is crucial.

No one is arguing that workers themselves should unilaterally have the right to set what those grievance procedures should be, but what this Bill does in effect is give the employer the right to unilaterally set down those grievance procedures. We cannot expect workers to accept that as somehow logical, fair and equitable. We are talking about a new House of Commons, about a context in which it is possible for us as Members of Parliament to change items in Bills in such a way that they are not matters of confidence. I very much hope when this Bill is looked at item by item that that particular obnoxious clause in the Bill will be one all of us on all sides of the House will agree has to be changed.

The kinds of very basic rights which any worker must be able to negotiate are with respect to classification of positions, staffing and, above all, with respect to the grievance procedures which are going to exist. We on all sides of the House must surely come to an agreement to change those clauses in this Bill so that our employees on the Hill will know that this is a serious piece of legislation in which they can have some faith. At this stage it is quite clear they do not have faith in this legislation.