

read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this Bill was debated in 1982, again in 1984, and it is now being debated for the third time. On the previous occasions, members of the Conservative Party supported the legislation, and in particular the former Member for Nepean-Carleton, Mr. Baker. Now the Conservatives are in power and the Liberals are part of the Opposition. I hope that members of the Government will continue supporting this legislation as they did in 1982 and 1984.

All I am asking in this Bill, with a few exceptions, is for federal public servants—be it with the Government or with a Crown corporation—to have the same political rights which are enjoyed by those people who are not federal Government or Crown corporation employees. On five occasions I have had to apply to my employer for a leave of absence without pay to be an organizer or a candidate. The leave was granted, albeit not willingly. When the election was over, I was able to return to my job without loss of seniority, at the same position which I held previously or at a better position. Surely that right should be enjoyed by those who are employed in the federal Public Service.

I suspect it will be mentioned by a few Hon. Members opposite that there are negotiations presently going on between the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. de Cotret) and members of the Public Service unions. The parties are negotiating what is called “the six-pack”—six items which are not necessarily contained in the collective agreements. In a statement before the press in Quebec City, the President of the Treasury Board indicated that an agreement had been reached on those six items. One of those items was the issue of political rights. I want to state categorically that an agreement was not reached. The only agreement which was reached was that the Government’s proposals would be discussed further by the people in the unions and that they would then meet again further to discuss these matters.

It was claimed in yesterday’s news reports that the meetings were held a day or two ago. In fact, on investigation it turns out that there have not been any recent meetings and that the meeting which was scheduled two weeks ago had been cancelled. The meeting was cancelled because the President of the Treasury Board was speaking at a school. Be that as it may, that would indicate that there is some degree of willingness on the part of the Government to make changes in those six areas, especially the area of political rights.

I would be happy if the subject matter of this Bill could be sent to the standing committee so that we could hear from the representatives of the Public Service who are affected.

I am very proud of my Party’s record because the first legislation which was introduced anywhere in Canada—and, for that matter, probably anywhere in North America—which gave full political rights to public servants, was introduced by the CCF Government of Saskatchewan in 1946 under the leadership of Tommy Douglas. Since then there have been numerous occasions when employees of a Crown corporation or a provincial government Department in Saskatchewan

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obtained leaves of absence to take part in an election campaign for the Parties which operated in the Province. When the legislation was introduced, there were four Parties. All of them, without exception, were granted their leaves of absence and were able to return to their duties. To my knowledge, all of those employees performed their duties in a most conscientious manner, even though in some cases their private political views differed substantially from those which were held by the Government of the day. There is no reason to think for one moment that the same attitudes could not be held by federal public servants as those which have been held by public servants in the Province of Saskatchewan since 1946.

I submit that unless and until the Government makes a move to grant these rights—not privileges but rights—sooner or later someone will take the Government to court and the Government will lose. We should not wait for that to happen, because no matter what Government it will be, it will be an embarrassment.

I hope that Members on all sides of the House will agree that the legislation is long overdue and that we should pass it very quickly to ensure that the political rights of federal public servants are the same as those enjoyed by other citizens of the country. For many years, Members of Parliament from all Parties, as well as my own, have put similar legislation before the House. I hope that we will finally agree that it is time to do something about this matter. It is time that the rights which belong to all Canadians, including federal public servants, should be put in place.

This legislation will in no way infringe upon negotiations which are going on between the federal Public Service unions and the Government of Canada. In a number of cases the collective agreements are up for renewal. The legislating of political rights will not infringe upon those negotiations. I hope no one will attempt to use that argument to talk out this Bill.

It is somewhat embarrassing that this legislation is so long overdue and that a Private Member of the House is required to introduce it. There is the whole question of how political rights can be and should be exercised by members of the federal Public Service or employees of federal Crown corporations. It is implicit in the Bill that those political rights may only be exercised in a public manner, outside working hours. The same was applied to myself. When I was an employee of the private sector, I conscientiously carried out my duties during working hours and at no time did I practise partisan politics. When I was off duty, Sir, I did carry out political activities, even though my employer did not agree with my political views, but my employer always knew that at no time did I transgress upon his requirements of me when I was on duty.

● (1610)

I am confident, Sir, that all federal employees would act in just as conscientious a manner, if not more so. I am sure that none of these employees in the course of exercising their political rights, in their own minds and hearts, and in their time off duty, would ever allow that to infringe upon their duty when they were at work for the federal employer. I believe that