

Canada Elections Act

Not only would Bill C-237 sponsored by our colleague maintain this practice, but it would add a new provision: upon application to the employer by any employee who is elected to the House of Commons the employer would grant a leave of absence, without pay, to the employee for the duration of his term at the House of Commons. In other words, if ever this Member of Parliament were defeated, he would automatically return to his job at the same level.

At first blush this proposition appears to be quite generous and acceptable. My colleague from Ottawa Centre, I think, suggested introducing a sunset clause, in other words a temporary provision which would apply for a limited time and enable an employee to return to his job, but this option would be open to him only during a certain period of time.

Let me give an example. Let us suppose that, after being elected to Parliament, because of various circumstances, a former postal worker is defeated a year or two later and that there is, as suggested by my colleague, some provision saying that if you are a Member of Parliament for four years, you are unfortunately no longer considered an employee of the Public Service and you cannot get your old job back.

The problem with such a proposal is that it would affect only a very small group in Canadian society, namely federal employees. It would create a distortion. Why them and nobody else? This is an argument which should be considered.

My colleague said: Give a chance to democracy. Would applying this legislation only to federal Government and Crown corporation employees not be less than democratic? I know that when he asks us to give a chance to democracy, it is because he would like the federal Government to play a leadership role in this regard. However, I believe that this proposal could cause distortions, and there are already many of them in our system.

It is true, as he said, that there are too many lawyers and professionals who, because of their social standing and the guarantees provided by their profession, can return to this profession if they are defeated. They acquire a prestige which they then, rather generously, offer usually to other businesses, and so on.

It should be noted however that the possibility of conflict of interests is there. We know that under the law Ministers or former Ministers are prohibited from returning immediately to their own business or to a previous employer to avoid a situation where they might divulge information to which they had exclusive access. So the law does contain a kind of ethical code to prevent such situations.

To my colleagues I would also suggest the case of a CBC employee, for instance, a political writer and commentator who would be known under a given label for two, three or four years, be elected and become a Minister, and who on the day after his defeat would stick a microphone in the face of his opponent, availing himself of the provisions of this private Member's Bill. I do not know whether Canadians would

appreciate my immediate return as a Radio-Canada reporter where I would interview and comment on the political activities of somebody who would have just defeated me. There are some particular consequences that would require special provisions.

One could consider the extreme case that someone from within the expanded federal Public Service and its agencies would be elected for a specific purpose, to defend special interests. For instance, a person supported by certain interests could get elected to defend proposals or policies concerning transportation or shipping. In any case, without wishing to prejudge a person's intentions, I maintain there might be a conflict of interests due to the unconditional guarantee that one goes back to one's previous job. The Bill does have its merits. Its purpose is to broaden the pool of candidates and to create a situation where we have what is referred to in the United States as the President concept, which means that anyone can become president of the United States, and so forth. I agree that, whatever people may say, and despite our laws by which we may run for election and eventually become ministers, it isn't easy and it is not exactly reassuring. Today, at least for young MPs, there is nothing that provides us with any security, considering that the mandate we receive from the people is only temporary, since many of us may be faced with possible defeat. Eventually, if this Bill is passed, we might see some rather extreme situations where someone who has been elected for 10 or 12 years finds that his job has disappeared. The labour market changes and situations change.

So if the Bill is adopted or is referred to committee, Madam Speaker, I would certainly add a sunset clause, a time limitation, as the Hon. Member said. That would certainly be one of the amendments we would have to add. Furthermore, we would have to look into all possible causes of conflicts of interest. We would also have to consider the somewhat elitist and anti-democratic aspect of a measure that would use taxpayers' money to help only a small segment of the population.

For these reasons, Madam Speaker, I am not sure at this time that the House should devote its energies to considering Bill C-237, unless it is prepared to make an exhaustive study of all the consequences.

• (1750)

[English]

Mr. Iain Angus (Thunder Bay—Atikokan): Madam Speaker, I was pleased to have the opportunity to second the motion of my colleague, the Member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez), whose riding, incidentally, is 700 miles away from mine. Despite that I know the name of his riding, unlike the Hon. Member for Nipissing (Mr. Mantha) who lives next door.

Before I begin my comments I would like to respond briefly to the remarks made by two of the government Members. I think they really missed the boat. The Hon. Member for