

*Public Service Collective Bargaining*

For a period of about two years, bargaining units in a large part of the public service would be defined in such a way as to correspond with the occupational groups identified in the classification structure now being developed and implemented by the Civil Service Commission. This feature, recommended by the preparatory committee on collective bargaining, is designed to ensure that bargaining rights are extended as quickly as possible, with a minimum of destruction to the ongoing processes of pay determination, and in a manner consistent with the interests of employees and the effective operation of the public service.

For the great bulk of the public service, the interests of the employer in bargaining would be represented by Treasury Board. Provision is made, however, for the designation as separate employers of a number of agencies, such as the National Research Council and the National Film Board, that have traditionally had a significant measure of independence in matters of personnel management. The interests of employees would be represented, of course, by employee organizations able to meet the normal tests for certification as bargaining agents.

Agreements reached would be binding on the parties. Arguments about their interpretation would be subject to mandatory grievances procedures and, ultimately, to independent adjudication.

The dispute settlement provisions in the bill are of great importance. In applying for certification as a bargaining agent, an employee organization would be required to choose one of two dispute settlement options; one providing for recourse to binding arbitration, the other for a procedure requiring reference to a conciliation board and offering, in defined circumstances, to employees other than those deemed necessary in the interests of the safety or security of the public, the right to strike. Each bargaining agent would be bound by the procedure of its choice and would be unable to change its option for a period of three years. The reason for the three-year period is to move through one bargaining period and on to the next before there can be a change in the option of employee representatives.

The arbitration of disputes would be the responsibility of an independent arbitration tribunal. For any one dispute, the tribunal would consist of a permanent chairman and two members drawn from panels of individuals representing generally the interests of

employer and employees. Awards of the tribunal would be final and binding on both sides.

I want to say how pleased I am, Mr. Speaker, with the reception given by the house to the Prime Minister's statement when he moved the resolution. I am likewise pleased to note the support for the underlying principles of the bill that has been expressed outside this house by the principal employee organizations.

A number of points were made during the debate on the resolution on matters affecting the proposed new system of staff relations in the public service. No doubt all of these will be given careful consideration in the joint committee. In the meantime, I would like to comment on one or two of the more important of those comments which were made.

There were warm words of praise for the National Joint Council of the Public Service of Canada. I am happy to associate myself and the other members of the government with the sentiments expressed. For more than two decades the council has served as a focal point of joint consultation in the public service. Its deliberations have led to a steady stream of improvements in conditions of employment and, what is perhaps more important, a steady growth in the maturity of the relationship between representatives of the employer and the employees.

For some months, Mr. Speaker, the National Joint Council has been reviewing its future role in the light of the anticipated introduction of a system of collective bargaining. Recommendations resulting from this review were approved by the council last week and were received in my office a few days ago. The government will wish to consider these recommendations before taking a definite position on the issues involved. I can now say this much, however: The government believes that in the new system there will be need for an institution like the National Joint Council in which representatives of bargaining agents and representatives of the employer can come together and jointly seek solutions to problems that go beyond those of particular bargaining units. Like the preparatory committee on collective bargaining, we believe that, if preserved and nurtured, the traditions associated with the council could be put to good use in the new system.

In the debate on the resolution, a question was also raised about the future role of the Pay Research Bureau. Let me say at once that in my opinion there can be no doubt

[Mr. Benson.]