

Employment in Public Service

for us. As a Canadian I have been very proud of the universal expressions of admiration for our public service.

● (5:50 p.m.)

Equally, Mr. Chairman, I share the admiration of other members for the competence and independence which the present members of the Civil Service Commission have shown, and for all I know their predecessors showed though I did not have the pleasure of knowing them, in the application of the merit system and the law. For that reason we are pleased to support the bill except for the reservations I have mentioned and in connection with which we shall try to get this committee to accept some necessary amendments.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Chairman, just a few words on Bill C-181, because it is interesting, after all, to hear the views of everyone. We just had a discussion between the hon. Minister of Transport (Mr. Pickersgill) and the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis), which showed us something of what happened and is still happening in the public service, in the political field.

In other words, public servants are prevented from engaging actively in the work of a political party, while we have the proof in this house that several ministers have at one time been members of the public service and that it is probably their work in the public service that permitted them to accede to the political life. It seems that some want to close the door to skilful public servants, who would like to devote their talents to the welfare of their country, as members of parliament.

I found enlightening, a while ago, that exchange between the Minister of Transport and the hon. member for York South. I did not know the hon. Minister of Transport had been a public servant once, like several of the present and former ministers that I know, some of whom were more successful than others.

I do not wish to take too much time of the house, because I am anxious—as the minister seems to be also—that this bill be passed without delay inasmuch as it brings certain improvements in the public service, although one has to reckon with human nature with all its evil inclinations.

More and more efforts must be made to relieve the public service from political patronage and to encourage technicians, in

[Mr. Lewis.]

short all those who deserve encouragement, regardless of their political affiliation. We should keep in mind that even though a public servant works for the government, he has the right to retain his political ideas and the right to defend them. I am not at all against that.

However, if a public servant wishes to stand as candidate for Parliament, I think that in such a case, he should resign from the public service. He would then be required to resign, to abandon his position, but as long as he does not run for office, I feel a civil servant should not be prevented from expressing his views or even from working for the man he trusts and helping him. In my opinion, if some people can defend a political cause, it is precisely civil servants familiar with the situation and well aware of every administrative strategy.

I am very proud that civil servants are urged to become more qualified; indeed, present employees are far from perfect and there is much room for improvement. Our civil servants are fairly satisfactory and since I am a little more chary of praise, I shall refrain from crediting them with the same qualifications as the previous speaker. But we find that a great number of civil servants are responsible, that they deserve some incentives and promotions to certain positions unattainable by them in the past, not because of their lack of competence, but because of their political allegiance.

It is absolutely imperative that the members act together and stop trying to influence appointments. Such influence has been exerted in the past and today, no one should imagine that there will no longer be any patronage when this bill is passed. No. When it is recalled that appointments to certain commissions are made by the governor in council, one can rest assured that the appointees will not be old-time members or partisans of the Progressive Conservative, the New Democratic or the Social Credit parties. That is understood. Let us not have any qualms about it. Human nature will remain as it is. Let us not make any mistake about it, but let us at least make an effort to be fair. We ask of those who play the political game, who do the picking, to show some fair play to the employees they are to hire. In fact, when I consider the Post Office Department, I think that if I were to go around the post offices in my constituency, I would not find three employees appointed by the Conservatives.