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Excerpts from a Speech by Prime Minister
John G. Diefenbaker to the Civil Service
Association of Canada, Thursday, May 1, 1958

... People everywhere these days expect much of governments. The days are gone when it was merely a matter of maintaining peace and order and ensuring the role of law. While modern society is still founded and will remain founded on the rights and responsibilities of the individual, on private initiative and private enterprise nevertheless it is a society that expects positive government -- government that is active and taking the initiative in many fields. This kind of government can only be carried on with the aid of many Civil Servants -- Civil Servants of ability and zeal.

Ours is a constructive task; a dynamic task -- comprehensive, varied and changing. We must recognize it as being not simply to administer Canada as it is but to carry forward and to promote the development of this nation. In co-operation with those directly engaged in development, and with provincial governments, we must help it and give it such guidance and direction as will ensure ever-widening opportunities and prosperity for the Canadian people over the next generation.

To accomplish this we must continue to push back our frontiers. It is in the opening up of the north that we shall see exemplified in this generation the sense of adventure and destiny which guided Canadians through several of their great periods -- first in the original settlement of this country and then in the opening of the west:

We have still many resources to be developed; much to be done in making the most of our heritage, in founding prosperity on our national wealth. Then too, to encourage the wise use of these resources is one of our major purposes.

Our national development must include advances in science and technology. To such advances we owe the revolutionary changes which many of us have seen in our own lifetime. These advances have been going on at an increasing rate in recent decades; have been paying increasing dividends not only in making our work lighter and our products better, but in helping to ensure that pace of economic progress which maintains our level of employment and incomes.

This advance in science and technology must be firmly based on our universities and on business. But much of it also takes place in government departments and agencies and is carried out by Civil Servants.

Our development includes not only these material things however. Our own institutions and social arrangements are changing and must be improved. In this continuing social evolution, in such fields for example as social security and labour legislation, modern government finds tasks that require the co-operative effort of those elected to public office and Civil Servants.

On the economic side, the major task in this day and age is to achieve economic stability along with rapid progress. We must steer a course between the twin economic dangers of unemployment and of inflation. This is a major task not only of government but also of business and labour and of other groups in our community as well. Its solution will require action that is based on an understanding of both these problems. For this understanding, however, we need to see the problem in perspective and not to over-exaggerate the dangers either of inflation or unemployment.

In these tasks confronting us, we must above all recognize that of preserving the peace. This requires us not only to maintain a ready deterrent military strength but a skillful and wise diplomacy.

In all these tasks to which the Government of Canada must devote itself, the Civil Service of Canada are taking an active part. In the north they are to be found at the frontiers and the outposts. In the development of our resources, the surveyors and the road builders are at work. In the laboratories the scientists and technicians pursue their projects. In the offices at Ottawa, thousands work together to guide in the charting of the course of the nation's progress and carry out those measures of administration necessary to achieve it.

Our deterrent military strength requires not only the men in uniform but tens of thousands of Civil Servants to assist them. Our diplomacy abroad depends now upon the work and skill of many hundreds of career Civil Servants. Their quality is vividly illustrated by the situation today where in New York we can see one Canadian Civil Servant presiding over the Security Council of the United Nations and another Chairman of the Economic and Social Council.

The Civil Service in Canada is capable of these tasks demanded of it, throughout its ranks and across the land. Canada has reason to be proud of those who have chosen the Public Service as a career and of the traditions which the Service has established for itself.

The Government of Canada intends to maintain a Civil Service that will serve Canada well -- indeed increasingly well. It wants to improve the Service and to that end we plan to carry forward with a revision of the Civil Service Act. The present Act was mainly developed forty years ago. While the principles then established were good, the rapid changes of the past four decades have rendered need of substantial revision. The necessary preparatory work has been put in hand during the past year. The Civil Service Commission is making a thorough review of the Act, the regulations under it, the procedures and policies followed in administration. Possibilities of improvements are being thoroughly canvassed.

The Commission is consulting with your organizations of Civil Servants and invites suggestions. I can assure you that any suggestions made will be considered not only by the Commission but subsequently by the Government. The Commission is consulting the departments of government which they serve and others with a specialized knowledge of their problems. It is reviewing experience in other countries. The Chairman of the Commission is just now returning from the United Kingdom where he has been learning at first hand of their methods and problems. Another Commissioner will depart shortly for Washington on a similar mission.

When the report and suggestions of the Civil Service Commission are received later this year my colleagues will decide on what we can and should recommend to Parliament. I would hope that, as a result, we will succeed in obtaining in Canada a thoroughly modern Civil Service system based however upon same principles which have received the support of Canadians over the past half century.

In this revision of the Civil Service Act, there should not be any alteration of the independent status of the Civil Service Commission as a quasi-judicial tribunal. The Commission is not an arm of the government to which Ministers can give direction -- it derives its powers and basic instructions from Parliament to whom it reports through the Secretary of State. Its members are appointed by the Government, as judges are, but they hold office during good behaviour for a minimum of ten years, unless removed by a joint address of both Houses of Parliament -- about as secure a protection as one can get to ensure independence. We are fortunate in having in the Commission persons of outstanding ability and long records of outstanding work as career civil servants with a wide variety of experience.

Our revised Civil Service Act, I am sure, will preserve the vital principles of the merit system which have been in our legislation for the past half century. Nowadays we take it for granted that Civil Servants are appointed and promoted on the basis of ability. We must not forget however, that this depends upon having the right principles in our law and the effective application of them by an impartial tribunal. This we must preserve.

The Public Service is so important, and its work affects all Canadians so directly, that we need the best men and women in it that we can secure. That is the positive aspect of the merit system -- to ensure the selection of those who will do the best job.

I am confident that when our Service is selected and advanced on the grounds of merit, it will be found to be broadly representative of the people of Canada from coast to coast. The methods of selection and recruitment should be devised to ensure that all Canadians of the necessary ability shall have a fair chance to enter the Service and to advance so far as opportunities and their capacities permit. I know that the Civil Service Commissioners are conscious of this need for a truly national service and they will have the support of the Government in achieving it.

I want to turn now to some of the matters with which you as an organization are more directly concerned -- pay, other conditions of employment, and the role of the organization of Civil Servants in dealing with such questions.

My colleagues and I sensed immediately after taking office that some changes and improvements in these matters were necessary. One of the first things we did as a government was to carry through a revision of salaries. One of the next things we did was to have the Civil Service Commission establish a Pay Research Bureau that would produce better information on which to base decisions concerning salary revisions -- better information than we found was available to the Commission, the Treasury or the Government. That Bureau is now operating effectively. In its operations it is assisted by an advisory committee on which there are representatives of Civil Servants' organizations -- including your own. The results of its research will be available to your organization as well as to the Commission

When the report and suggestions of the Civil Service and the Government. I think this improvement will be a great step forward -- enabling your representatives and those of the Government to discuss questions of salary in the light of the same information collected and compiled by an expert impartial body.

In this matter, information is vitally important -- for the most important element in setting Civil Service salaries is to have a proper standard of comparison with salaries in private employment. This must be our guide.

For many years it has been generally accepted that two main principles should guide the determination of salaries in the Service. First the salaries must be enough to do the job, that is to attract enough of the right kind of men and women into the Service and keep them in it; second, they must be fair as between civil servants and people outside the Service, the taxpayers if you will, which means that the salaries we pay for any class of work should be comparable with those paid by private employers for similar classes of work, taking into account the other terms of employment that are necessary to make a fair comparison. I think these principles should continue to guide us.

These general principles -- in somewhat less modern terms -- were used by those who first established our salary classifications some forty years ago. Here is what is said in the report of those who did the detailed work for the Civil Service Commission in 1919 in explaining the principle on which they worked:

"The pay for each class of employment should be equitable, that is, fair to the employee and fair to the taxpaying public.

"Fairness to the employee requires that the compensation should permit him to maintain a standard of living that will make for the good of society and posterity. In the case of the lowest ranks of the service, the compensation should be adequate to attract into the service young men and women without family responsibilities but of a training and capacity that will enable them to become of future value to the service and to themselves.

"The interests of the worker thus provided for, fairness to the taxpaying public requires that the compensation should not materially exceed that paid for similar service by enlightened employers in the general industrial and commercial world. Any excess over such prevailing average is in the nature of a special subsidy with which no group should be favoured. Furthermore, fairness to the public requires that in comparing the compensation paid for services to the public with those paid in the business world for similar services, the relative advantages and disadvantages of public and private employment, such as permanency and continuity of tenure, hours of work, holiday and sick leaves, and related factors, should be taken into account."

Much has changed, however, in the application -- and it is to the application of this policy that we are directing our attention. General revisions of salaries have become much more frequent. On the whole there has been a large absolute increase in salaries over the forty years since the Civil Service

Act established the general classification plan -- increases not only in money terms but in real terms as well. Moreover, a number of what are now called "fringe benefits" have been added -- the chief one of course being superannuation benefits and their progressive extension to more and more of the Service until now they cover the vast majority.

The Government has considered a recommendation from the Civil Service Commission proposing an extension of the 5-day work week to all remaining classes of employees of the public service except light-keepers and fire-fighting staffs, and has decided to extend this provision to the remainder of the Civil Service, with the above exception. As to the fire-fighting staffs, there are difficulties and further consideration will be given to their ultimate inclusion. On the other hand, fringe benefits have in recent years become increasingly common in private employment and this has to be taken into account in assessing the total "package" of pay and benefits which the Civil Service classes get in comparison with those who work outside. I am confident that the Pay Research Bureau, with the aid of others concerned, will now be able to make fair and accurate comparison taking all these several benefits into account.

In this progressive evolution of the terms of employment in the Civil Service I have been glad to find that representatives of the Civil Servants have taken an increasing part. Some of this has been by way of briefs and reports presented from time to time to Ministers -- or by discussion with the Civil Service Commissioners or their officers. I have already had some experience myself of this -- and I expect to be seeing a group from this organization tomorrow.

There has been a more systematic organization of discussions between your representatives and those of the Government through the National Joint Council. The Staff Side of the Official Side of the Council have been able during its fourteen years of existence to reach agreement upon a good many proposals that they have jointly recommended to the Government. These have usually been approved and put into effect as, of course, should be the case if the Council works properly. While this process has not extended to determining salaries, apart from the earliest days of the Council, it has covered almost all the other terms of employment. I believe from what I have learned of it that the work of this Joint Council has represented a major advance in the role of Civil Service organizations -- and has enabled them to influence significantly the development of the terms of employment of their members.

I believe that Civil Servants, through representatives of their organizations, should have a greater voice in the process of determining Civil Service salaries. There should be a more systematic method of bringing your views and your information to bear in the application of those principles of salary policy on which there is already a wide measure of agreement.

I think this improvement can be achieved within the general framework of institutions and laws which we have already. What is needed is more opportunity and better arrangements for your representatives to sit down at a table, with officials representing the Government, and with officers of the Civil Service Commission, having the essential facts and figures before them, to discuss in detail the comparisons between Civil Service salaries in various classifications and the pay for similar work in private employment. From this I would hope a common understanding could emerge; and will provide for a better understanding.

Several of my colleagues are working now on this question as is the Civil Service Commission and I hope that it will be possible to proceed with improvements along this line in the near future.

To carry out substantial discussions of this kind on a regular basis will involve a lot of work for all of those concerned -- your officers, the officers of the Civil Service Commission and those who represent the Government.

You will have noticed I spoke of your representatives having "a greater voice" and participating more effectively in the application of certain principles of policy. Your power will be the power of persuasion. Your success will depend, as it should, upon the merits of your arguments and the skill of your representatives in presenting them. From what I have heard and seen of the officers of Civil Service organizations, they should be able to present your cases well, particularly now that they will be aided by the work of the Pay Research Bureau.

Such is the direction in which things are moving now. We shall have a number of opportunities to review our progress in this field when we are considering the revision of the Civil Service Act that is being prepared. Parliament, too, will no doubt wish to review progress in this field when it takes up the revision of the Civil Service Act. You can be assured of every opportunity to have your views on all these matters thoroughly considered by those who will have to take the decisions upon the courses to be followed.

As an organization, your primary purpose is naturally to improve the material well being of your members and their terms of employment. It is right and proper that your members should organize to see that their case is effectively presented and their interests are safeguarded.

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