

in the House that that is not the policy of the government. The government has consistently taken the view that public sector employees should be fairly paid. Those comparisons are available. I think the hon. member will find that we have been consistent and fair in our treatment of public sector employees, and will continue to be so.

EQUALITY FOR MALE AND FEMALE EMPLOYEES

Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill): Madam Speaker, this is not a press release, this is a cabinet document. Since the cabinet document speaks of yet another group that is being picked upon by the government, that is, the postal operations group which is 75 per cent female and earns approximately \$3.50 an hour less than the male group doing the same type of work, and since just last week the Canadian Human Rights Commission ruled against the Treasury Board proposals for the settlement of the equal pay for work of equal value claim of the general services group, will the minister confirm to the House that he and his government have no commitment to the Human Rights Act and that the government is going to ignore or stall any attempt to achieve equality in the workplace because it uses its workers as the victims of its policy?

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (President of the Treasury Board): Madam Speaker, it is ironic for anyone to suggest that this government has no commitment to the Human Rights Act since it was the preceding Liberal government that introduced the legislation which enshrines the principle of equal pay for work of equal value in Section 11 of that statute.

We made an offer to the Human Rights Commission with respect to a settlement of the general services group dispute. The matter is extremely complex given that there are seven subgroups of the group, three of which are female dominated and four of which are male dominated, but within each one of those groups there are 13 different pay levels and there are 22 different pay zones in Canada. So the challenge for us was to come up with a formula which we thought was fair without creating reverse discrimination against the male employees in groups which could be moved behind some of the female dominated groups. We have made such a proposal and I was pleased that the Human Rights Commissioner, Mr. Gordon Fairweather, acknowledged that we were making a genuine attempt to resolve this difficulty.

We are re-examining the views expressed by the Human Rights Commission and I hope we will come forward with some other negotiated settlement. But the proposal we made, I think, was fair in the circumstances. It moved to an average and substantially increased the various levels of women's groups, in many cases beyond comparable levels for male groups, which, of course, could give rise to what we call the leap-frog effect. So the matter cannot be dealt with in a simple approach. It is a serious problem, one which we are working very hard to resolve on a fair basis to the women employees in the federal government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Oral Questions

POSSIBILITY OF LEGISLATIVE CHANGES

Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill): Madam Speaker, the minister seems to think that just because Treasury Board made an offer, that is a real attempt to reach a settlement. It took a long time for the government to get around even to making an offer in this case which has been hanging on its back for months and months.

The document and the minister's memorandum to cabinet list what I would call a horror story of union bashing tactics, including limiting the right to strike, ignoring comparability, making the public service take lower pay increases than the cost of living, ignoring equal pay laws, lockouts, wholesale designations, deferring the right to strike, and even excluding some groups from the right to seek arbitration. Can the minister answer two questions: first, what legislative changes will he be proposing to the House, and second, what other unilateral action is he planning to take to deprive workers in the public service of their already limited right to negotiate a contract?

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (President of the Treasury Board): Madam Speaker, I think the view this government takes is that legislation should be re-examined from time to time to make improvements which are in the interests of both employees and employers, in the case of the PSSRA, for example. That act has been in effect since 1967. I would point out that the right to strike was also given by a Liberal government. There is absolutely no intention of being unfair to public service employees.

That document which the hon. gentleman keeps waving and which he alleges is a cabinet document, is simply not one. I do not know what other documents he has at his disposal, but I am quite prepared to discuss with the hon. member, or with any other members of the House, the kind of proposals they believe should be brought forward to make the right to strike more effective and to protect the interest of the taxpayers, the citizens of this country, as well as to protect the interest of the public servants.

* * *

TRANSPORT

GRAIN TERMINAL DEVELOPMENT AT PORT OF PRINCE RUPERT—DISAGREEMENT OVER SITE PREPARATION

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Transport. It arises out of the stalemate in the negotiations which is further delaying the development of the grain terminal at the port of Prince Rupert. It arises out of the fact that the National Harbours Board is reneging on one of the fundamental articles of the memorandum of understanding signed by the federal government and the Prince Rupert Grain Terminal Consortium, that precise article being the equal sharing of the cost of site preparation, including the placements of caissons if necessary. I would ask the Minister of Transport why the National Harbours Board is refusing to honour that commitment. May