

Public Service Retroactive Pay Cheques

● (11:20 a.m.)

been effected. The government knew what would transpire when the system was altered but, like everything else this government does, they did not prepare themselves for the situation that did in fact develop and as a result people have suffered and continue to suffer.

Now the minister informs us that the future will be bright because another firm of management consultants will be hired by the government to examine all aspects of the government pay system. At this late date the minister has decided that the whole pay structure system should be examined. If the government continues to hire management consultants at the present rate we will soon be informed that they are hiring a firm of management consultants to study the work of the multitude of management consultant firms they have retained to study the oversights they have failed to anticipate when they undertook changes. If management consultants were required by the Department of Supply and Services, they were required before and not after they got into this mess, and surely they should be able to determine now within the government service, and without the additional expense of outside consultants, what should be done. The Department of Supply and Services should be setting an example for other departments in examining and solving problems rather than shifting the onus to agencies outside the government to solve problems that should not have been allowed to develop with such severity and dislocation in the first place.

The minister must know that his explanation is far from satisfactory with regard to the inability of his department to deal with the situation that developed. Certainly the 185,000 employees know this to be the case.

Because of the inability of the government to anticipate the problems that would ensue the taxpayers of this nation have been burdened with the expense of an additional 75 employees and payment for 3,000 hours of overtime. This, Mr. Speaker, is just not good enough and indicates the inability of this government to cope with the problems of the day.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the Minister of Supply and Services for providing us two or three hours ago with a copy of this statement and I thank him for making it in the House this morning.

Whether or not the delays and difficulties which have been experienced recently have been resolved will be established, I imagine, within hours. If it is true, we will not hear anything about the matter but if it is not true we will continue to hear from those who have not got their retroactive pay cheques.

Other than that initial comment, there are three brief remarks I should like to make. First, I join with the Minister of Supply and Services in criticizing the other areas of government that have been far too slow with respect to the matter of pay increases. As the minister has said on two or three occasions, he is only at the end of the pipeline. It is somewhere downstream, or upstream, that the delay has taken place. I earnestly hope that the business of getting collective bargaining going and pay increases put into effect will be speeded up and that the Minister of Supply and Services will not have to level this criticism against other areas of government.

The second of my three comments I suppose has been made for me by the preceding speaker. I, too, am afraid that this firm of management consultants will get in the way. We shall have to have more of them. In the end a white paper will have to be put out and, eventually, we shall have to have a reference to a committee. It seems to me that there ought to be a simpler way of straightening out this problem.

My third comment is that the paragraph I like best in the statement is the penultimate one which says:

It is my hope that representatives of the staff associations will be actively involved in this examination to express the point of view of their members.

I trust that the minister will turn that hope into an assertion. I have noted with interest the comments on this question which have been made, notably by the Public Service Alliance of Canada and the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada. They have made it clear that the main trouble is not with those who are working in the Central Pay Office but with the system, and they have ideas as to how the system can be improved. Their approach to this question is much more practical than that of management consultants. I hope the minister will not just hope that these people can get involved but will bring them in very actively and obtain their assistance in straightening out this situation so that these delays may be a thing of the past.