

back on the plane and go to Calgary and take their lumps there. I wonder whether the minister is aware of that fact, or the fact that those travelling from the Atlantic provinces en route to Vancouver could not stop at Toronto but had to go on to Calgary and take their chances there. For that reason it is not right to say that this is only a B.C. problem. This problem is centred in British Columbia but it is nationwide, if not international, and it might well become that to a significant degree. Let us not make any mistake about that.

It disturbs me to hear the Minister of Labour (Mr. Munro) say he cannot intervene because we have a Public Service Alliance, which is the agent on the one hand, and the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury) on the other hand. What the minister should appreciate is the fact that the negotiations are not realistic and he has every right, under section 195 of the Labour Code, to appoint a mediator. This is a general section which perhaps needs more interpretation on my part. But the Minister of Labour has said he is aware of this situation and that mediators are ready if called upon. I think he should take the initiative.

What bothers me is the attitude of the President of the Treasury Board. When we hear that he is involved, the only conclusion most of us can reach is that he is callous and hard, and I say that with a great deal of respect. I wonder whether the President of the Treasury Board knows about the discrepancy which exists. A fireman is a fireman no matter where he works, and this is the important situation the President of the Treasury Board must face. He must approach this problem with full disclosure and bargain in good faith. He must realize that there is an ever-widening discrepancy as a result of which people are becoming extremely frustrated. I agree with the leader of the NDP (Mr. Lewis) who suggests that we must reduce that discrepancy.

We find that the national wage is approximately \$9,100, yet in the city of Toronto a municipal firefighter is paid about \$12,124. A firefighter at the Hamilton municipal airport is paid by the city of Hamilton approximately \$11,500. A firefighter in Vancouver earns about \$13,000, and in Calgary, where there is some peculiar arrangement because of its status as an international airport, firefighters are paid \$13,000. In Edmonton they are paid \$13,000. The most significant statistic I can find relates to the fact that a first-class constable in the RCMP in the 1960's was earning an average of approximately \$4,000 per year, as was a firefighter. Now, as I understand it, an RCMP constable is up to \$12,000, while for the firefighters it is approximately \$9,000.

● (2240)

Does the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury), with all his wisdom, not realize that this discrepancy is frustrating and leads to the sort of thing that has happened at Vancouver where the dissidents, against the will of the Public Service Alliance, went on strike? We do not condone that, of course not. It was most unfair of the ex-minister, the hon. member for Verdun (Mr. Mackasey) to even suggest this. He is a good friend of mine, but I must say it was most unfair of him to even suggest to the hon. member for Vancouver South (Mr. Fraser) that he was condoning an illegal strike. The hon. member for

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Vancouver South when he opened his remarks was most careful and responsible in that regard in stating that we do not go along with it and do not condone it. He was attempting to bring to the attention of not only the President of the Treasury Board but also the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) the very serious situation in terms of the discrepancy that exists.

The Minister of Transport said he has sent out two representatives. The hon. member for Vancouver South said he does not understand this. I have difficulty in understanding it myself. If he can send two representatives out to discuss this matter with the dissidents, why cannot the minister himself to out there? I am not concerned about what the former minister of labour, the hon. member for Verdun, said about this. If we can send out two representatives, it is no more frustrating, surely, to the collective bargaining process than if the minister went out there himself. It is a matter of great importance.

I am getting sick and tired of ministers who seem to have some hang-up with regard to the collective bargaining process. They seem to have forgotten that the public interest must remain paramount. There can be no question about that. If there is, then I find that my six years of experience here have come to naught, because I thought we were sent here to protect the public interest regardless of which facet we are talking about. I see the minister shaking his head. I understand. I am trying to be responsible today. Normally I get mean and rant and rave, but this is different. I am attempting to make some valid points. The minister cannot just sit there day after day. We had to beg the Minister of Labour personally to intervene in the Seafarers' International dispute. He said he could not do that because it would have been premature. We on this side seem to know what we are doing. The other side does not.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but his time has expired.

Hon. C. M. Drury (President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, I should first apologize for not having been present throughout this debate. I had wished to be here during the course of the whole debate. However, I have had reported to me, albeit second-hand, some of the views expressed and I have listened to some of the speakers.

The suggestion was made by the last speaker, the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander), that the government is not concerned with the public interest. Perhaps if I were not to try to disclose the course of the negotiations, but to indicate some of the background, it would be seen that the government is preoccupied with the public interest. The objective of the government is to secure agreement through the collective bargaining process. It is only in the event that we cannot reach agreement through this process that resort is had to arbitration, which is the method of dispute settlement chosen by the firefighters in this particular case.

As the hon. member for Hamilton West and others have pointed out, there are quite considerable variances in the wages and salaries paid to people in the profession of firefighting across Canada. Firefighters are regarded differently in Canada by the communities in which they