

Adjournment Debate

very complex subject which nevertheless requires special attention, since in his 1983-84 annual report, the Auditor General of Canada referred to the problem and even pointed out that 79 per cent of public service positions were overclassified.

This implied that incumbents in these positions were receiving remuneration in excess of that justified by the duties they were performing. It also meant that one out of five public servants was overclassified and receiving a salary that was too high, compared to what his fellow public servants were being paid. It also meant additional costs for the Canadian taxpayer, and my interest in the matter became such that I put a question to the President of the Treasury Board to find out what he was doing in the way of taking corrective action and remedying this problem.

Mr. Speaker, I realize that the issue of job classification is a very technical one, but I would like to give a definition used by the Auditor General himself, and I quote:

Job classification is an integral and important part of employee compensation in the federal public service.

It is a process by which the relative worth of federal public service jobs is determined and through which each job is assigned to an occupational group and level.

He goes on to say, and I quote:

The actual rates of pay and other terms and conditions of employment for a particular occupational group and level are determined either through collective bargaining or unilaterally by the employer, the Treasury Board.

The Auditor General also mentioned in his report that the classification system used today covers about 222,000 employees. The system is characterized by extensive delegation of authority to deputy heads of departments and heads of agencies to classify jobs. It is therefore very decentralized.

In several occupational groups there seems to be a noticeable shift—that is, noticeable to the Auditor General as a result of his examination—towards upward reclassification of jobs to higher paying levels. Overclassification was therefore being used in a number of cases to promote public servants.

The Auditor General of Canada also pointed out deficiencies in management controls over job classification. He said there were no official mechanisms obliging those responsible for classification decisions to account for the manner in which they exercised that responsibility.

In April 1984, and I mentioned this to the Minister in my question, my colleague from Windsor West, the former President of the Treasury Board under the Liberal Government, reacted to this criticism by the Auditor General and introduced corrective measures to remedy misclassification.

My question to the present President of the Treasury Board was simply: Was he prepared to inform the House about what he had done to date to try and remedy this problem and was he prepared to share his views with the House?

[English]

I was not surprised but somewhat taken aback by the answer of the Minister which exceeded my expectations. He told me some wonderful things. First, he told me that he had come close to negotiating contracts with Public Service unions in matters which dealt with job classifications and several other issues. In fact, he referred to six issues on which he apparently had been negotiating with staff associations. He did not give me a direct or precise answer to my question, but he talked about interesting progress and about the six issues which I just mentioned.

● (1805)

After he left the House, the Minister became highly original. He talked about, at least of the issues which are currently being discussed with the associations, a master contract and more political rights for public servants. That is wonderful if it is true. I should like to refer to *The Citizen* of February 5, the day before yesterday, in which he was quoted as follows: "We hope to have an agreement on the totality of the package in a very short time". This originality came as a complete surprise to staff associations, as it did to myself. They had been taking part in the negotiations and were not aware that the Minister had come to a conclusion. They were on radio this morning saying how surprised but how pleased they were that the Minister was agreeing with them. I see you rising, Mr. Speaker, so I will conclude.

Mr. Doug Lewis (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, I cannot help but register my interest that the Hon. Member has been able to ask his question during the "Late Show" so quickly and also pull into his remarks the questions of *The Citizen*, et cetera. I agree that he got them in, but I do not think they have any relevance to the question which was asked.

I am pleased to note the Hon. Member's compliments to the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. de Cotret) on how forthcoming he was. I think that should be noted on the record. Obviously the Member will agree with me when I say that that is the record of the entire Government. I am pleased that he recognized it.

The Hon. Member was right. The problem of misclassification was identified by Treasury Board audits. It was also remarked upon and reported upon by the Auditor General. However, corrective action was taken by the last Government and, to a greater degree, by this Government. I should like to review what has happened.

The corrective measures announced by the former President of the Treasury Board last April covered such items as restrictions on salary budgets to control more closely funds available for reclassification and a requirement to pre-audit any reclassification to ensure that the work being performed actually coincided with that described in the job description. This is what the classification level is based upon. Some 23 per cent of the misclassifications were in cases where that relationship was lacking. In addition, a review of the job classification standards for groups in which significant numbers of misclassification