

Airline Firefighters Strike

I do not believe that this House of Commons, in the kind of debate we are having here tonight, is indeed the proper forum in which to arrive at a settlement of a collective bargaining dispute. I certainly agree with what was said by the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis), that this dispute is not the responsibility of the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand). He is not the employer. His job, for better or for worse, is to operate the airport system in Canada. The only person in this House who has any ministerial responsibility to whom we can address ourselves is the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury). He, in effect, is our agent in this situation, and when I say "our agent" I mean in the sense that the government of the day is responsible to this House for its action or lack of action. In this instance the proper member to whom we should address our remarks is the President of the Treasury Board.

In the days before collective bargaining in the public service had been introduced—days when the only kind of business agent people in the public service had was their member of parliament—I remember putting forward the proposition advanced tonight by the hon. member for Verdun (Mr. Mackasey), namely, that rates of pay of people in the public service in St. John's, Newfoundland, should be roughly the equivalent of rates in Vancouver. I must say that all efforts I made in this direction were not apparent as far as producing results is concerned, but it is heartening to find someone on the government side of the House advancing that thesis. It is only unfortunate that the hon. member for Verdun, in advancing the thesis, is not speaking as a member of the ministry. Perhaps one of the reasons he is not in the ministry is that he has not been able to convince the President of the Treasury Board of that kind of position.

One hon. member mentioned that the President of the Treasury Board said it would cost \$64 million to equalize rates. We hear a lot of debate about equalization payments, and quite frankly I cannot think of any more economically sound form of equalization payments than reasonably equalized rates that are uniform across the country within reasonable limits. Those rates, just as the equalization payments, have to be based on some calculation of the highest average rather than on some calculation either of the median or lowest average. I hope the hon. member for Verdun will continue to pursue his line of argument with his colleagues in the Liberal caucus, and in particular with the President of the Treasury Board.

• (2230)

That is the real solution to this situation and that would bail the Minister of Transport out of his present dilemma. That and that alone is the kind of approach I feel this House of Commons should suggest to the government tonight. I do not believe that much more can be achieved by the House of Commons at this point in time. When we reach eleven o'clock tonight we will not have passed any motion except that the House adjourn. Unless the President of the Treasury Board is in a position and willing to rise some time before eleven o'clock and make a real announcement, we will have to endure the collective bargaining behind the scenes in which he is involved and

[Mr. Barnett.]

await the outcome of that process. Otherwise, I see little advantage in prolonging this debate.

We have made our views clear and we have tried to say what should happen. That having been done, the matter should go back to the collective bargaining forum with the realization that sooner or later something has to be settled. I think even the President of the Treasury Board would be prepared to make that admission. I know that he likes to take the hard-fisted approach on occasion, particularly in reference to money matters, and in part at least that is his responsibility.

However, I suggest that if he wants to do a real service toward resolving the kind of dilemma which keeps recurring, the dilemma which some of us from areas such as Vancouver Island have to wrestle with from time to time as a real and proper grievance, he will be prepared to rise tonight and announce that he accepts the principle of the federal service of Canada being paid on a national rate at a level which is reasonably equivalent to the average of perhaps the two highest salaried provinces in Canada, or some such formula. Then perhaps hon. members such as the hon. member from southern Vancouver Island will be able to go home for a comfortable sleep in the knowledge that Canada is not falling to pieces quite as badly as he suggested.

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, I want to make just a few comments in respect of this entire matter and to offer some praise to the hon. member for Vancouver South (Mr. Fraser) who had the ability to determine that such a motion was required at this time. What he has tried to do, and I think he has done the job in an exceptional fashion, is bring home the point that someone here in the House of Commons must be concerned about the public interest.

I come from a city which is labour-oriented, with big unions, and I therefore have appreciation for what is talked about in terms of the collective bargaining process. Since I have been here no one has seemed to want to stand up and talk about the interests of the third party, that is, the Canadian public—that interest not represented at the bargaining table but which in many instances has found itself on the short end of the stick and wondering why.

The hon. member for Vancouver South has attempted to say that he has a responsibility as a member of parliament to bring home his concern, the concern of all members of parliament, for the public interest. I have heard a lot of talk about management, whether it be in the government or in the private sector, and a lot of talk about the unions; but no one seems to take it upon himself to suggest that there is another party not represented at the bargaining table about whom we should be concerned. I intend to continue to register my concern as a member of parliament, as did the hon. member for Vancouver South, for that third party.

It has been suggested that this is a Vancouver or a British Columbia problem. That is not quite so. When stopping at the Toronto international airport yesterday on my way to Ottawa, I was approached by several members of Air Canada who were up in arms over the fact that travellers aboard BOAC hoping to get to Vancouver were told they could not stop over at Toronto but had to get