

*Airline Firefighters Strike*

work, there is no question about that, but a reasonable solution escapes us for the moment I was pleased to learn through reports over the phone tonight that the Ministry of Transport has now belatedly contacted the firefighters and that discussions aimed at ameliorating this wage issue are soon to be in progress if they are not actually in progress now. I hope these discussions prove fruitful and the men go back to work, not because of threats but because it is in their interests and every body's interests to do so.

Let us leave aside for the moment the legal niceties that have been bandied about here during the last couple of days. I am fully aware that bargaining sessions between the Public Service Alliance and Treasury Board are currently in progress, and I know as well about the national pay scale resolution passed overwhelmingly by the recent Public Service Alliance convention; but I am firmly convinced that national rates ignore the feelings and the welfare of British Columbia workers.

● (2120)

The federal public servant in British Columbia has to live right next door to his provincially and municipally paid vocational equal, but receives \$150 or \$200 less a month for this efforts. He has to keep up with Mr. Jones who works provincially and he, Mr. Smith, solely because he is employed federally, is at a severe economic disadvantage. The cost of living, it may be argued, is essentially the same all across Canada, but the standard of living, especially in British Columbia, is far above the national norm. No federal public servant in British Columbia, I am convinced, wants to increase his income at the expense of his colleagues in Halifax or Montreal. What he cannot accept continuously year after year is a 30 per cent hammering in comparison to men similar to himself but working in provincial institutions.

I plead with the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand), the Minister of Labour (Mr. Munro) and the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury), and any other person who has been involved in this thing, to recognize what I have attempted to express tonight and those ideas contributed by the hon. member for Vancouver South with an attitude of great responsibility, public awareness and good faith. We ask that some action be initiated immediately. If it means that the Minister of Transport has to vacate his lofty position here and go out to the coast to speak to these men, well and good. I think he must ensure that national rates apply, but that those national rates are so developed that the high-wage areas do not suffer unreasonably and that the higher rates apply to all of Canada. I ask this not just for British Columbia, but for Rouyn, Quebec, or wherever else they may be appropriate. All federal public servants must have an opportunity to live up to the standard of living which prevails in the high-wage areas.

I notice, Mr. Speaker, that you are getting ready to stand, but in five seconds I should like to pledge that I am prepared to accompany the Minister of Transport to Vancouver in any attempt that might be successful in bringing the two parties together. We must have a successful solution to this very disturbing problem emanating from the province which I am very privileged to call my home.

[Mr. Rose.]

**Hon. Jean Marchand (Minister of Transport):** Mr. Speaker, I must confess that this afternoon when I heard we were to have this special debate tonight I thought that a debate of this kind would not be very useful in terms of providing a solution to the problem. However, I notice that those who have spoken up until now have tried to make a contribution in order to help the situation rather than hamper it. To that extent I am very happy.

I would like to know a little less about the labour movement and the wage structure in Canada so that I could speak with my heart and my feelings, but I know too much and some other hon. members here in this House also know too much. We must take into account certain realities. There is the fact of the illegality of the walkout. There is no doubt about that. We know that this action or movement has started in Vancouver and we make an effort to understand it from a human point of view. We should not immediately try to crush a movement which perhaps has some kind of justification or at least a very sound explanation. This is one aspect and this is the reason we have not proceeded more rapidly. The second thing is that the regional and national wage structure is related to two things, the structure of the labour movement and what we call the national bargaining unit. I am sure the alliance is not opposed to the people of Vancouver having a decent salary, but they know that from the moment you regionalize the wage structure sooner or later you will have a breakdown in the bargaining unit and in the alliance.

I am not defending here a thesis in which I believe very deeply. This is the thesis that has been sustained by the labour movement, the CLC, and this is what is at stake. The alliance is not trying to keep the firefighters of Vancouver in a position of inferiority because they like it, but because they opted for what we call the national wage structure, and that means that the less developed regions in Canada where wages are naturally lower, as in the maritimes and Quebec, are helped. On the other hand, perhaps this does not help the most advanced provinces. This is the reason for the reaction which comes mostly from British Columbia. I understand the reason.

I also understand why those who come from the maritimes would probably sustain the thesis of a national wage structure because there is no doubt that it helps them tremendously. This is why we had to be very careful. We have the structure of the union and the national bargaining unit. I think the alliance is quite prudent, and I understand why. On the other hand, I am sure I am one of those who understand why the firefighters at the Vancouver airport who are earning \$2,000 less than the firefighters in Vancouver no doubt feel frustrated.

I understand this, and this is the reason I have asked my people who are meeting right now in Vancouver and who have been meeting for an hour, to tell the men that I cannot make a promise that a move will be made to negotiate. This is not the system we have. If anyone wishes to change the system, perhaps he would tell me what it should be. We have what are called exclusive bargaining rights of the union certified by the board. We cannot go through any other channel. This is the law. There is exclusivity of bargaining rights. The alliance possesses this, and we must go through the alliance. If we