

Adjournment Debate

of the employees, I suppose some kind of a cost of living clause or something like that. However, it has not been forthcoming. I suggested to the minister that what we need perhaps are regional bargaining units in order to strengthen the hand of some of the employees in the regions. The minister told me that would not be the right way to go. I am not sold on the idea, but I simply tossed it out as a suggestion as something that might protect those in the most vulnerable positions.

It seems to me that whenever you have the government promoting this kind of equality it favours the strong rather than the weak. The strong are either those in a bargaining position who can easily expose the vulnerability of society by withdrawing their services—as firemen could do across the country—or those who have large voting blocks within the union. That is precisely the problem we are faced with in the national unions today, for example, a bargaining union in British Columbia consisting at most of several hundred people and a bargaining unit in central Canada comprising several thousand people. You can see what would happen in a national vote with numbers like that. It reminds you a little of the Prime Minister's (Mr. Trudeau) referendum formula and how that is supposed to work for the country.

There is no way employees who work for the federal government in British Columbia will ever end up with a package to meet their needs, because the large voting block in central Canada will consistently outvote them.

It is in the interests of the President of the Treasury Board to have a national union so that he can always pit one group against the other. Is that his scheme? It is the same scheme the federal government uses in supposedly trying to solve disparities invoked upon the people. The government settles with one tribe and antagonizes several other tribes. This is exactly what it is doing with the national unions.

● (2205)

What happens then is that those who are working in the British Columbia region are focusing on those working in central Canada and they become the enemies or the antagonists, rather than the employer. This is not a bad scheme.

I am focusing right now on the matter of the employees of the fire department of the Vancouver International Airport, but the same thing holds true for immigration officers, those working in the penitentiary services, the parole service, or any of the other bargaining units in the PSAC. Whenever you have a national union bargaining for all employees across Canada, you have inequality that creates an innate unfairness with regard to large segments of that union within the country.

As I said, it is in the government's interests to promote that kind of friction within the union so it can get the kind of package which is cheapest and looks best for the employer, but works a hardship.

I should like to know from the parliamentary secretary tonight whether there is to be something laid on the table for the employees at the Vancouver International Airport, because they will soon be in a strike position and they need a settlement. Even if they were not in a strike position, the disparity

they are facing in their salaries is sufficient to make some of them lose their homes, and it is taking away the money they need for their groceries. I would like to have a commitment from the parliamentary secretary tonight that there is going to be some kind of settlement which will recognize the element of fairness that should be part of all bargaining and which will provide a settlement for those workers at the Vancouver International Airport.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member but the time allotted to him has expired.

Mr. Norman Kelly (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, I may misunderstand the nature of this debate, but I thought the Public Service Alliance insisted on a national or uniform pay scale right across the country, while it was the Treasury Board that was attempting to negotiate regional rates of pay that are in some way related to the average rates of pay of outside firefighters in the areas where those firefighters are employed.

So, I am pleased to tell the hon. member that the negotiators are prepared to consider any proposal by the union to rectify regional disparities. I think the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Johnston) and the hon. member opposite can find common agreement with that understanding.

As for the establishment of several bargaining units for such a widespread group of firefighters, I would have to tell the hon. member that this appears unlikely, but such a matter would have to be decided by the Public Service Staff Relations Board.

RAILWAYS—REQUEST FOR INTRODUCTION OF VIA RAIL
LEGISLATION

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Mr. Speaker, the question I raise this evening arises from a question I posed on July 13, 1981 as it appears at page 11454 of *Hansard*. At that time I directed that question to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) asking for clarification about a rumour at that time of a potential cutback of roughly 20 per cent of VIA Rail services in Canada. The minister indicated he was not able to give a firm answer in the House at that time but that he was in full agreement on the need for a new VIA Rail act and other items that were ancillary to the improvement of VIA Rail.

Since that time, as you know, action has been taken by the minister through his announcement of July 27 when he announced the cutback of some 20 per cent of Canada's rail passenger service in a unilateral and arbitrary manner, at which time the House was not in session, and at a time when Members of Parliament and members of the public had no opportunity to consider that decision.

● (2210)

Mr. Speaker, I find the minister's action shameful and it is causing a great deal of anger, outrage and regional discord throughout the country. The decision has grave implications for hundreds of thousands of Canadians who use and rely on