

Routine Proceedings

what any group might say to the contrary, are committed to serving the nation. In return, the nation must treat public servants with fairness, with equity and with the same respect for the law which the government demands from all participants in our society.

[English]

Mrs. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West): Mr. Speaker, while I do indeed applaud the minister's words, as I have many times in this House, I regret that the actions do not always match the words. Certainly we support and welcome any initiative toward economic justice, equal pay for work of equal value, employment equity, and, as the minister said, basic equality in our society and marching forward into the future on a fully equal basis between men and women.

Nonetheless, I welcome this first hopeful, if tentative, step toward finally paying 70,000 people who work for the people of Canada what their work is really worth.

It has been a privilege to stand in this House half a dozen times since last spring and raise the long outstanding promise and the failure of this government to implement pay equity. On virtually every occasion that I have spoken in this House on any employment or human rights issue, the government has been taken to task for its failure to bring its treatment of workers into conformity, not with some ideal principle but with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of this country.

My colleagues on numerous occasions have reminded the government of its obligation to pay people an income that matches the value of the work they do, not based on their gender.

Through this fall we have seen three strikes with horrendous economic and human costs because the government has treated basic justice as something to be used as a bargaining chip at the negotiating table. We have seen contempt for a decision of the Human Rights Commission. We have seen the withholding of money to which people are entitled until they are forced into a settlement of a contract the government has been unable to negotiate in two years.

Even today, in this action which is justice delayed and finally under way, we see a unilateral action and a failure

to make a commitment to proceeding to implement fully the results of the study to date.

I suspect that once again, although I welcome the specifics of the announcement, the government is acting not out of a commitment to fairness and justice but out of a very realistic recognition that the major union involved in the study of pay equity has withdrawn out of frustration and in fact intends to take several cases back before the Public Service Staff Relations Boards and the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

I suspect that with the suspension of this action cases now before the Human Rights Commission that were simply suspended in action while the study was going on may be reactivated. I remind the House that we are talking about 50,000 underpaid workers who launched the case with the Canadian Human Rights Commission several years ago and a thousand or more nursing employees who have a similar case before the commission.

Having let the talks lapse, having failed to come to some agreement and some commitment as part of that joint union-management study that the results of the study would be accepted and there would be a short timetable for implementation, the minister is now arriving like Santa Claus and handing out goodies as if they were some kind of largess from the government, when really all these hundreds of millions of dollars represent is injustice that is finally starting to be righted, money that they were entitled to for many, many years.

I want to look at this announcement very carefully and compare it with what in fact has been coming out of the study of positions. If we go back to the Human Rights Commission case of the hospital workers we find that each hospital worker was entitled not to something in the neighbourhood of \$3,000 or \$4,000 but on average to \$10,000 each over the period of time.

• (1230)

Estimates have been made that implementing the employment equity study would cost in the neighbourhood of between \$200 million to \$300 million annually, not retroactively over five years. Thus I want to have a very close look at this. I want to assure the minister that the pressure is still on to make sure that full and complete pay equity throughout the Public Service is implemented, that this is an interim step in the right