

Private Members' Business

One major stumbling block for those unionized workers in the negotiations going into the campaign was the regional rate of pay. They were doing the same job at the ship repair unit in Halifax as was being done in British Columbia. They had the same job classifications, the same jobs and were working on the same classes of ships, but in some cases the wage differential was as high as 28 per cent.

The regional rate of pay was made an issue in the campaign, that it was a discriminatory practice. They were not seeking a commitment from the government of the day to collapse it all at once. They wanted a commitment that it would be recognized over the next one or two collective agreements that the rate should be collapsed.

In 1989 a ships crews strike tied up the St. Lawrence Seaway. The government was not concerned until there was a freeze-up and the possibility that commerce going up the St. Lawrence Seaway would stop. At that time the ships crews strike caused legislation to come before this place to break the strike and put them back to work.

What was the issue that caused that ships crews strike? It was the wage differential between the two regional rates. There was a west coast rate and an east coast rate and the dividing line went right down the middle from the Arctic Ocean. Conceivably, if a ship was in trouble in the Arctic it could be responded to by ships crews from either the east coast or the west coast. If they both got to the troubled ship at the same time, there was as much as a 20 per cent or 25 per cent wage differential. They were doing the same jobs on the same ships on the same high seas, sometimes in 15-metre swells. They were going out to save lives and there were two different wage rates which were based on where they lived.

How much money did they get? This whole strike was caused because the ships crews from the east coast region were making between \$19,000 and \$21,000 a year. They wanted their pay package to go up to what it was on the west coast, about \$22,000 to \$23,000 a year. That was what caused the strike.

When it went to binding arbitration after the legislation passed the House, the first thing that happened with the tripartite panel was that it collapsed the regional rate of pay. It saw it as discriminatory. The panel then went on to other non-monetary issues. The history with the last three or four cases that went to binding arbitration where the regional rate was an issue is that it was immediately seen as discriminatory and was collapsed.

The east coast ships crews after they saw what happened at the tribunals told me: "The next time we are not going to bargain in good faith. We will just tie it up and hope it goes to binding arbitration because the binding arbitration process will find the rates discriminatory and will collapse them".

There is a principle here which we should listen to carefully. It is the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. That is it, straight, clean and simple. Some will argue that if you live in Halifax you should get paid less than if you live in Winnipeg. If that is the case, why are 91 per cent of federal employees in Canada paid under national rates of pay? That means that while the ships crews or the ship repair unit charge hand in Halifax get paid up to 28 per cent less than their west coast counterparts, other employees of the federal government are working in the same area and are getting identical rates of pay as their counterparts who are doing identical jobs in Toronto, Sudbury, North Bay, Victoria, Vancouver and St. John's.

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It does not make sense. It cannot be argued that a regional rate of pay has to be maintained so that it does not disrupt the local private labour market when at the same time 91 per cent of the employees are on national rates of pay. It simply does not make sense and is discriminatory.

The government of the day of which I am a member will say that we are in a period of restraint. I understand that. Collective bargaining was suspended in the 1994 budget. That was not something I supported then and it is not something I support today. It is wrong. I support the collective bargaining process. I said it when that legislation came forward in the House and I will say it again today.

The government indicated that once it got beyond its \$900 million or \$1 billion in savings which it was trying to accommodate by the wage freeze and the suspension of collective bargaining, any further savings would be reallocated back into the pay packet. It would perhaps talk about the increments but certainly it would look at some of the pay equity issues.

I implore the government today to see this not as one of those issues that affects just a few people. This is an issue of pay equity. Just as the government has committed itself at the earliest opportunity to address those inequities in pay equity as it is traditionally defined, I ask the government today to also extend that definition to regional rates of pay.

What does it mean? The best numbers I have are from September 1994 and they have changed. In September 1994 there were 211,823 employees on the federal public service payroll. There were nine groups that were still under regional rates of pay which amounted to 23,233 people. That means 9 per cent of the Public Service of Canada is being discriminated against based on no other factor than where they live.

Should we tell the charge hand down in Halifax who is being paid 13.7 per cent less than the west coast charge hand that he should work only 86.3 per cent as hard as the individual on the west coast? Should the general trades and labour individual who is paid 13.2 per cent less work 13.2 per cent less hard? No. The performance evaluations they face are exactly the same no