

Government Orders

one day, the settlement of \$5.5 million per year is certainly not a great deal of money.

It is my understanding that the issue of the sea duty will settle the strike. It is incomprehensible to me that we should be here in the House forcing a group of very valuable employees.

• (1240)

In some ways the circumstances surrounding the strike of the hospital services group is not all that much different in that the government has failed miserably. We must bear in mind that when we are talking about the court action it refers to this group as well. It refers to an innumerable number of people within the civil service whom they had not designated. It just turns out that these are the groups who, in modern parlance one could say found their one window where they were able to exercise their democratic rights.

Never in the past and certainly not in the future will these people ever be able to take this kind of action again. This is their one opportunity in their lifetime, unless the government changes its mind, smartens up and treats these people with the justice, dignity, and honour which they deserve. I am not saying, and I am sure the union is not saying, that there are not some who are essential. But to just heavy-handedly describe 100 per cent of these people as being essential defies all credibility.

The government also wished the hospital services group to be designated as essential and, as I have already pointed out, failed to do so. The hospital services group are the people who clean the government hospitals, handle the food in the veterans homes and the hospitals, are the certified nursing assistants and the registered nursing assistants. In short, they are the less well paid people within our society and, surprise of surprise, they are mostly women. Perhaps not so unsurprisingly, many of them are single mothers with families, as well as many older women who depend on their jobs for a livelihood. These people on average make somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$20,000 a year. In most regions of the country \$20,000 a year for a family of four, unless resident in a place populated by less than 30,000, is below the poverty level.

These are the kind of people we are dealing with and this is the condition they find themselves in as a result of the government's intransigence and unwillingness to treat them in a fair manner, and bargain with them in a justifiable way. These are not women in the workforce who earn a second income for the family. These are primary earners in the family and they depend entirely on this kind of work for their livelihoods.

Here we have the heavy hand of the government trying to designate these people as essential so they would not be able to strike. We now have them designated as having to return to work because they are so sorely needed by the hospitals and the veterans homes where they work. In the two general elections in 1984 and 1988, women were promised by this government that they were going to be front and centre as far as affirmative action was concerned. They were promised equal pay for work of equal value, that yes, it was part of the government's policy. The government was going to do the very best it could to make sure that any private sector company dealing with the government would be encouraged and hopefully, before too long, forced to comply with the equality principles of equal pay for work of equal value and all the things that go along with the niceties of human rights.

Not so. To repeat myself again, we find ourselves in this House trying to force these people back to work. It strikes me rather strange that the government would be able to consider this type of action, which can only be described as Draconian, as having any similarity to human rights and to equal pay for work of equal value. That is one of the major issues which we come across because just as surely as the government used its heavy hand to try to get these people to be considered essential service, we have a history of doing everything we can to prevent, in spite of an order by the Canadian Human Rights Commission in 1981, of not these people what they ought to be paid.

I will read what the Canadian Human Rights Commission actually said in their decision.

The parties are agreed that the Health Services group, which is predominantly female, has received less wages than the general workers, a group predominantly male, for performance of work of equal value.

The Canadian Human Rights Commission in 1981, for all intents and purposes, said to the government: "Clean up your act. Pay these women in the HS group, for the