

Airline Firefighters Strike

perpetuate the philosophy expressed on previous occasions by the President of the Treasury Board and other spokesmen, does it not realize that its actions will affect significantly the fabric of the Public Service Alliance? Why should we divide the public service into compartments? Why should the government pay less to some people who happen to live in the poorer regions than to compatriots or companions who live in the so-called prosperous regions of Canada? Such policy can only weaken the fabric of the Public Service Alliance. The entire membership of the various associated unions will become more restive if such policies are pursued. They will be open to blandishments and raids from other unions. The situation will have a disrupting effect on the entire labour movement. It cannot be called a constructive situation. We cannot afford to disrupt the workings of the public service by reimbursing employees in one part of the country more than in another part for the same type of work.

In a letter dated September 25, 1973, the President of the Treasury Board calculated how much it would cost to pay public service employees on an equal basis right across the country. He said in part:

An estimate of the cost today of converting federal public servants who are paid on a local or zonal basis to national rates would be about \$54,000,000. This figure represents only the increased cost of the wage bill and not indirect costs of such things as fringe benefits.

I say to the hon. and venerable President of the Treasury Board, so what? I know \$54 million is not peanuts; neither is the \$750 million the government has budgeted to pay outside consultants in the present fiscal year. I know that Treasury Board may not be able to make the commitment to end regional wage disparities in one fell swoop. Yet surely the time has come for a firm commitment which will remove these disparities.

The Minister of Transport has the expertise, credentials and knowledge of the labour movement to bring in new policies for his department as he promised and on which he is publicly working at present. He should take the lead, together with some of his more enlightened colleagues such as the hon. member for Verdun and, presumably, the Minister of Labour (Mr. Munro) in trying to convince the President of the Treasury Board and some of his colleagues who are taking a reactionary stand in terms of regional pay disparities that it is time to make a commitment to stop perpetuating this philosophy. As a former minister of regional economic expansion, he must surely realize the paradox which is inherent—as some of my hon. friends have mentioned—in, on the one hand, spending hundreds of millions in the name of increasing regional economic opportunities in this country, and on the other hand going along with a philosophy which continues to pay people, who in many cases live in areas of the country where not only is the pay lower but the cost of living is higher, on a lower wage scale than those more prosperous areas of the country.

● (2010)

I do not think the Minister of Transport really subscribes to this philosophy. It does not make sense to allow such a situation to continue. The President of the Treasury Board, however, has been quoted in no unequivocal terms on the subject. As reported at page 7121 of *Hansard*

[Mr. MacKay.]

for last fall, his parliamentary secretary, the hon. member for St. Boniface (Mr. Guay) put it this way:

As the President of the Treasury Board has said on more than one occasion the government as employer is committed to paying rates which are equitable and competitive with those paid outside the public service for similar occupations.

He doesn't honour the commitment, since this definitely does not apply in the case of the firefighters in Vancouver. It is certainly not true in the case of the nurses under federal jurisdiction, where the Professional Institute of the Public Service sought in vain to get them a fair deal. The disruption which took place in the Department of Veterans Affairs was disturbing to many members of this House and particularly disturbing to the veterans who suffered as a result.

The situation is very clear. Just as it has interfered in this case with the portfolio of the Minister of Transport, just as it interfered in the recent past with the portfolio of the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald), Treasury Board pay policy will continue to be a thorn in the side of other ministers on the treasury benches.

So I plead once more with the Minister of Transport not only to bring in a policy clearing up the present difficulties in transport, but to try to convince the antedeluvian head of Treasury Board to take a more enlightened attitude toward the question of regional pay scales for public servants.

Mr. Allan B. McKinnon (Victoria): Mr. Speaker, once again air transport in British Columbia has been brought to a standstill, this week because of an illegal strike. Travel between Vancouver Island and the mainland by air is limited to small sea planes. To those of us who come from the island, it appears that the mainland is isolated. That could be a headline in the *Daily Colonist* tomorrow if that paper were not also tied up by a strike.

I am not prepared to put the blame for Canada's industrial troubles entirely on stupidity or prejudice on the part of either employers or employees. The main causes of Canada's accelerating labour troubles appear to me to be, first, a considerable increase in people's expectations, largely the result of improved advertising, inflation, and the functioning of the mass communications media—it is sometimes referred to as the inflation psychology—and, second, a lack of competent leadership. The government shows no confidence in its own actions. It passes legislation but is either unable or unwilling to make certain that the law is respected. This is particularly evident when working conditions in government service are in dispute. The government issues edicts. They are ignored. The government threatens. The threats are ignored. It is like the pusillanimous schoolboy drawing lines in the dust and daring an opponent to step over them, which the opponent immediately does. This is the case of an illegal strike followed by disobedience of a court injunction. The minister regaled us with his tale of inflexible law but he is the one person who can institute change.

What has brought our industrial relations to this sorry state? There was a time not so long ago when the labour movement was dedicated to improving the lot of all working men and women. This seems to have been replaced gradually by a "devil take the hindmost" scramble to stay on top of less powerful fellow men. A desire for social