

Private Members' Business

It would be incongruous if the rule relating to Thursday divisions was different from that relating to divisions deferred on any other day. If, for example, a division is demanded today, the chief government whip or the chief opposition whip may defer the division to any time tomorrow not later than the ordinary hour of daily adjournment. It would be incongruous if the rule were interpreted, as the hon. member has suggested, that where a division is demanded on a Thursday it must go to 6.30 p.m. on Monday and not to any intermediate time. It cannot go to Friday. That much the rule is clear on.

I submit that Standing Order 45(5) allows for discretion in asking for a vote any time during the day on Monday, assuming that Monday is the next sitting day, no later than the ordinary hour of daily adjournment. That is the purpose of the rule, in accordance with the interpretation which has been placed on it over many years. The decision which was made last Thursday to defer the vote until 5.30 p.m. today by the Chair on request was absolutely correct.

• (1110)

Mr. Ringma: Mr. Speaker, for today, as I have said, we are quite happy to accept 5.30 p.m. as the time for the vote. I submit it is your prerogative to examine the case put forward today versus that of the government benches to see what the technicality is.

The Speaker: I thank both members for their intervention on this matter. I have re-read the rules. What I would like to do at this point with your consent is have a brief look at the tapes and to revisit *Hansard*. I will rule formally later this day.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

REGIONAL RATES OF PAY

Mr. Ron MacDonald (Dartmouth, Lib.) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should consider abolishing the Regional Rates of Pay, now in force for certain federal government employees, in accordance with its stated policy of pay equity.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a good way to start off on a Monday morning, dealing with an issue that is not just temporal or philosophical. This is an issue that fundamentally affects far too many public servants right across our country.

I do not know if it is luck or what it is, but this is the third time in two Parliaments I have been lucky enough to have my motion drawn for debate. The first time was in the second session of the last Parliament, in June 1990 and again in the third session in September 1991 a similar motion was also drawn for debate.

It is an issue that is near and dear to my heart. It is an issue that has affected, over the years, tens of thousands of federal employees. And it is an issue, once again, that I believe should be brought to the attention of the people who are elected to represent these public servants. As members of Parliament we are supposed to be affirming in the House the equality of employees, the equality of individuals, the equality of opportunity and the equity of people's labour.

I will talk a little about the regional rates of pay so that people understand exactly what they are. In years gone by, the federal government through the collective bargaining process, came to an agreement with its federal public employee unions that there should be regional rates of pay.

This was done at a point in time when the economies were much different than they are today. It was done at a time when one could argue that there were vast differences in economic conditions in various parts of the country, say in Winnipeg, in Halifax, in Sydney and St. John's, Newfoundland.

As total or global packages were negotiated it was agreed that there should be regional rates of pay. It meant that employees of the federal government who did a similar or identical job would get paid at a different rate based on where they lived.

As time went on, initially the rates grew in numbers. With the development of our economy, with the genesis of the economy and the consolidation of transportation infrastructure across the country, it became increasingly apparent that to continue a discriminatory wage practice based solely on a single factor of the employee living in a certain area was clearly discriminatory.

Over the last 15 years through successive collective agreements each and every time there has been the global negotiation, the number of regional rates has collapsed.

They have gone from a high of 35 or 40 down to today where only 8 or 9 regional rates of pay are left. That is solid recognition that individuals' pay should be based on their qualifications and the job they do and not on where they live. Their fundamental wage package should not be based on where they live any more than it should be based on their language, colour, gender or culture. It is discriminatory. Today it still stands as a discriminatory practice. What does this mean? It means quite a bit to the people who are affected by these discriminatory wage rates.

• (1115)

During the 1988 federal campaign one of the big issues in the Halifax—Dartmouth area was dealing with the general trades and labour group at the ship repair unit in Halifax. Its members were in a legal strike position. Treasury Board and the Tory government of the day in their haste to go to the electorate forgot to designate them as essential employees. Therefore for the first time ever the potential was that those employees might be in a strike position.