

ponent of the public service. That is what the minister wants, and that is what these strikers in British Columbia may be forcing, against the interests and rights of many working people in this country. Treasury Board would love to have regional bargaining for public service rates. It makes it easier for them. They can go to a place like Halifax, ascertain the wage rate in surrounding industries, then enforce it on the public servants and that is it. No one can kick. They would have a much easier time. Whether it would cost less, or more, I do not know. I have never made that kind of calculation. I know that the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury) and Treasury Board officials prefer regional bargaining. When the employer prefers something, employees ought to suspect that it cannot be on their side. That is where I think the firefighters are making a mistake. They are going to open the door and let Treasury Board get exactly what it has wanted for many years, as any spokesman of the Public Service Alliance or the Professional Institute of Public Servants will tell you, Mr. Speaker.

● (2200)

My final point is this, and I may not agree with what my colleague said, which shows that we are not monolithic in thought. I can appreciate the problem of the Minister of Transport in going out there and giving these 200 strikers, or whatever the number may be, the status and improvements they want in order to break the national bargaining situation. I know the Minister of Labour (Mr. Munro) will experience the same kind of difficulty. But it would not be difficult for the President of the Treasury Board and his officials to settle with this component of the public service and right away increase the rates of firefighters across Canada and reduce substantially the injustices from which firefighters in British Columbia are suffering. That could be done in one week.

If the President of the Treasury Board, who really has the duty to act in this situation, were to say, "I am meeting with the bargaining committee tomorrow and we are going to make a settlement as fast as humanly possible which will remove most of the disadvantages from which these men suffer now," I am certain that those reasonable men would go back to work tomorrow. The responsibility, sir, is not that of the Minister of Labour or of other ministers; the responsibility is that of the President of the Treasury Board. He should have been here tonight to assure this House, the firefighters, the president of the Public Service Alliance and the other officials who are in the gallery that the negotiations which are now going on will be speeded up so that the problem in British Columbia will be, if not solved at least alleviated to the point where the strikers will go back to work.

Mr. Marchand (Langelier): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, may I inform the hon. gentleman that the President of the Treasury Board is not here because he replaced me at a ceremony. I preferred to be here. He should be here later.

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to accept that and I withdraw my condemnation of the President of the Treasury Board for not being here. But I do not withdraw my criticism of him for the policy which he pursues.

Airline Firefighters Strike

Mr. Elmer M. MacKay (Central Nova): Mr. Speaker, most of the salient points have already been presented to the House in a way much better than I could put them. Nonetheless, I wish to comment about some of the issues raised by my colleagues this evening in all parts of the House. In fairness to the hon. member for Vancouver South (Mr. Fraser)—and here I direct my remarks to the hon. member for Verdun (Mr. Mackasey)—I suggest that what he was proposing was that the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) and other responsible cabinet officials should involve the Public Service Alliance and other appropriate representatives in the process of conciliation—not "deviate around them."

Although we do not endorse this strike which is, rightly, termed illegal, we recognize that in the public interest something must be done. As the hon. member for Verdun and the Minister of Transport have emphasized, there are certain laws in this country which ought to be obeyed. Nevertheless, they are not immutable like the laws of the Medes and Persians; and one should remember that the law is an ass, if it is administered by asses.

I suggest, in all seriousness, that the problems we are discussing tonight go much deeper than they first appear. This point was made by the leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Lewis) and by others. The strikes at Vancouver airport and Esquimalt have been called illegal, rightly so, but their root causes are disturbing. Many factors have brought about this situation. The Minister of Transport is concerned about this apparent breakdown in the orderly process of collective bargaining. But he should be encouraged, as well, by the responsibility that the Public Service Alliance of Canada in general, and other firefighters across the nation in particular are showing. Their courage and responsibility in the face of the very short-sighted and poorly conceived pay policies are to be commended. Those policies, as the leader of the NDP pointed out, are being administered by the head of Treasury Board.

As I have mentioned in this House on other occasions, the intransigence and unyielding attitude of the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury) is responsible for a great many difficulties and needless complications in many government departments, including not only the Department of Transport but other departments as well. Last year we witnessed the striking example involving federal nurses. Their representative, the Professional Institute of the Public Service, tried valiantly to get a fair deal for them right across the country. Those efforts were stymied by the unyielding attitude of the President of the Treasury Board. One could point to other examples. As the hon. member for Fraser Valley West (Mr. Rose) said half in jest when repeating a point I had raised earlier, if the government is to follow regional pay policies across the board, members of parliament ought to be paid different rates according to the regions they represent. That shows what would happen if you took the policy to its logical conclusion.

What we are discussing tonight is serious, because what could happen could bring serious consequences with regard to the jurisdiction of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. I do not profess to be an expert in labour matters. Let me say this, however. If the government means to