

Adjournment Debate

yesterday requesting an in-depth study of the federal wage policy as it affects all federal workers in the Atlantic region seems to me, and to most members from that area, a reasonable request. In fact, given the vague and ambiguous answers offered by the minister in charge of DREE, as well as the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Chrétien), as a rationale for the present policy, we feel that it is imperative to get such a study.

We are fed up with being reminded by the President of the Treasury Board that "for a number of occupational groups in the public service, a regional approach to rates of pay has been in effect for many years". The fact that a wage policy is an old one is not sufficient for it to be considered a valid or equitable one. We are also tired of being told, as the DREE minister told me in May, 1975 in hearings before the Standing Committee on Regional Economic Expansion, that "it is not just the federal government that has regional rates".

I would remind the minister that when the present minister of external affairs took over the labour portfolio, one of the first things he did was to raise the federal minimum wage above that then granted by provincial jurisdictions because, as he said then, the federal government has to give leadership in this field. Giving leadership when it comes to justice for blue collar workers and others in the Atlantic region seems to be the last thing on the minds of the treasury board decision-makers.

The facts are these, Madam Speaker. Fact No. 1—Disparity exists in wages paid to federal employees in different regions of Canada. Fact No. 2—The Department of Regional Economic Expansion was set up in 1969 to help close the income gap that exists between different regions of Canada. Fact No. 3—Many federally employed public servants in Atlantic Canada receive less, indeed much less, than do their counterparts in other regions. Fact No. 4—These federal wage disparities exist even though federal income taxes are paid on an equal basis in all regions of Canada. Fact No. 5—It takes the same effort, mental and physical, to do the same job within the federal service wherever the worker is employed in Canada. Fact No. 6—The present high cost of living is, if anything, higher in the Atlantic region. Fact No. 7—The recent increase in pay of members of parliament was the same all across Canada, on the basis of equal pay for equal work. Fact No. 8—The recent increase in judges' pay was the same all across Canada.

However, when it comes to blue collar jobs in the federal sector of the Atlantic region, the equal pay for equal work principle goes out the window. There is an annual difference of some \$4,306 a year for a certain class of electrician in the federal government service if that person works in Vancouver rather than Sydney or Halifax, Nova Scotia. Federal government carpenters get \$6.42 in Toronto and \$5.23 in Halifax and Moncton. There is rank discrimination when we consider that the federal government as an employer pays an unskilled labourer \$4.80 in Vancouver but only \$3.82 in New Brunswick. Hospital workers, janitors, general labour and tradesmen and many other categories of people are also affected in a similar manner.

In an answer given in May, 1975 to the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East (Mr. Forrestall) concerning the

[Mr. Hogan.]

total annual cost of regional rate elimination for all government employees, the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Sharp) estimated that it would cost about \$79 million. If we accept that figure as fairly accurate, then, of course, it would be reduced by the amount of all forms of taxes, direct and indirect, which are paid to all levels of government.

The multiplier effect of such an expenditure, even correcting for losses from such an income stream through personal savings, taxes and buying of imported goods, would have a significant effect on the growth of income in the Atlantic region. In any case, all we are requesting is an in-depth, comprehensive and detailed study of this federal wage policy. What we are getting as answers to our concerns are glib general rationalizations which are traditionally vague. The time is overdue for such an objective study, because it should be clear to everybody that the present policy promotes jealousy and regional disparity, and does nothing for the unity of this country.

• (2210)

Mr. Joseph-Philippe Guay (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Madam Speaker, the hon. member has outlined numerous reasons why he would like to see an additional appraisal or study of the present wage policy of the federal government. He suggests that this study should concern itself, and I would like to quote him, "as it affects all federal workers in the Atlantic region".

The Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Jamieson) discussed with hon. members in the standing committee the efforts which DREE and other federal departments are undertaking to lessen income disparities across Canada. He also referred to the practical problems of coming to grips with the application of so-called national pay scales, which include important implications not only for the federal government but also for other levels of government as well as the private sector and unions.

I can go no further this evening than to reassure the hon. member, as the minister has done, that the government is very much aware of the need to lessen income disparities across the country. Numerous departments, including DREE and manpower, are involved in this fight, and the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Chrétien) has indicated that his officers are keeping abreast of changing circumstances within the public service.

INDIAN AFFAIRS—LACK OF NATIVES IN SENIOR POSITIONS IN DEPARTMENT—GOVERNMENT ACTION

Mr. Dean Whiteway (Selkirk): Madam Speaker, I rise tonight to deal with a question I asked the minister with reference to the number of Indian people who hold decision-making positions in the higher echelons within his department. The history of our country is not a proud one. It is not a history which is honourable. We have not treated our first Canadians in an honourable way or in a way in which I, as a Canadian, can look at with any amount of pride. As a matter of fact, it is a history that has blackened our nation.

Our policies hitherto have been steeped in ethno-centrality and served white superiority. Our history is a