

PUBLIC SERVICE—REGIONAL PAY DIFFERENTIALS—REQUEST FOR ACTION TO CORRECT

Mr. Elmer M. MacKay (Central Nova): Mr. Speaker, in his always kindly way, the venerable President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury) said that my question on March 15 relating to regional pay inequalities in Canada was based on lack of knowledge. If he said so, then of course that must be the case because, after all, he is the head of the Treasury Board and his attitude on all matters relating to his department is above reproach. Or is it? Well, I may not have the learned gentleman's knowledge, but what I do have is some appreciation of what constitutes fair play and equity so far as his pay policies are concerned. So once more, as so many members of my party have done in the past, I want to bring to the attention of this House the inequitable and regressive attitude exhibited by this government toward the concept of equal pay for equal work for employees under Treasury Board jurisdiction.

● (2200)

The President of the Treasury Board has taken a militant and unprogressive stand in support of an entirely indefensible position. One might say that he, in his near-derthal way, has redoubled his efforts in this regard having lost sight of his objectives, which surely should be to do away, on a gradual basis, with the situation that exists in this country whereby employees under Treasury Board jurisdiction, whether they are nurses in New Brunswick or shipyard workers in Nova Scotia, are paid differently than their counterparts in other areas of Canada.

It is not realistic to bring about an absolute removal of wage disparity all across Canada at once because of the sudden disruption this could cause in a number of trades where economies of scale are at play. However, there is no doubt that our national economy can accept the philosophy of equal pay for equal work, which should be carried out in two basic steps. One step is immediate acceptance of equal pay increases so that disparity is not further increased. The second would be to commence immediately reduction of the existing differential so that it can be eliminated over a period of time.

I and others in my party have put on record the great differentials in pay with regard to nurses under federal jurisdiction. I am sure it is well known that the bitterness that these nurses felt, and still feel, has caused a considerable amount of justifiable concern to their representatives such as Mr. Phythian, Mr. Spruin and others in the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada who worked so hard on their behalf in trying to have the arbitral award dated October 16 of last year reviewed. The President of the Treasury Board, of course, resisted any such action.

The nurses' situation is deplorable, but there are many others; for example dockyard workers who suffer from the same sort of illogical disparity. Let us look at the status of dockyard employees in Canada under the existing agreement between the Treasury Board and the Federal Government Dockyards Trades and Labour Council, which expires on March 23 of next year. The differential in wages paid to dockyard workers in Nova Scotia and British Columbia, or to be more precise in Halifax and

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Esquimalt, is very substantial indeed, yet the cost of living in these two cities is practically identical.

The contract rate for machine-tending at level 3 is \$4.31 at Halifax, and \$5.03 at Esquimalt. A classification in which the federal government should be very interested in a sense, since its members are so very good at it, is that of manipulators. For manipulating, at Halifax the rate is \$4.92, and at Esquimalt \$5.56. There are greater differentials existing than the ones I have cited.

It is a very ironic situation which finds that in those parts of Canada which suffer most from unemployment, inflation and various other economic maladies, workers receive considerably less wages than workers in the more prosperous parts of the nation, both doing exactly the same work. While the President of the Treasury Board attempts to explain the validity and the equity of his position with regard to the foregoing, Mr. Speaker, perhaps at the same time he will explain why he and his government are permitting the federal civil service to expand by another 13,000 employees and why projected government spending for the year starting April 1, 1974, is up so dramatically.

He should also keep in mind that the estimates are double what they were six years ago and four times what they were ten years ago. Yet this minister said on CTV "Question Period," if I am quoting him correctly, that so far as the main estimates were concerned, the government's purchases of goods and services other than transfer payments are substantially the same in the current year as they were last year.

In spite of that, the President of the Treasury Board refuses, in the midst of all these expenditures such as \$750 million to be paid to outside consultants to the civil service, which itself is costing the nation in excess of \$4 billion, to allocate funds to correct this very inequitable pay policy which goes straight to the heart of regional inequality and basic fairness so far as working people are concerned. I doubt if he could get one provincial premier to support the stand he takes in this regard. But of course the government has never been too concerned about what the provinces think. When we look around this chamber and see the representation that the government has from most of the provinces in Canada, the results of its attitude are plain to see.

Hon. C. M. Drury (President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, I apologize for not being here at ten o'clock when the adjournment debate started. I was detained by the miscellaneous estimates committee which was discussing the estimates of Treasury Board. The committee spent some time discussing the reason for the substantial difference between the total estimates the federal government sought from parliament ten years ago and those of today. I will not endeavour, in the space of three minutes, to repeat what I said in a somewhat longer period before the committee, but I suggest that if the hon. member refers to the minutes of that committee meeting he will find that I have not been wasting my time.

I find that the hon. gentleman is inconsistent. He complains about increases in expenditures by the public service on public servants, indicating that there is a distinct lack of care for the taxpayer's pocket, yet at the same time