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Mutual Respect Needed ~ Patrick Brown

Forget all that business about ferry workers being overpaid. They are our neighbours, they do an honest day's work for a living wage, they have to be qualified, experienced and reliable for their jobs, they have to be nice to the customers (that's us, and we're not always as nice as we might be), they work shifts and weekends and some very strange hours, and they are sometimes out in the damndest weather. And many of them have been doing it for twenty years or more. That's what it means being an 'essential service.'

Forget all that business about Mr Hahn. It's Davy's Navy for now—for better or for worse. Hahn has landed himself a job that looked great on the surface, but he's been set up. The government has attempted, through the *Coastal Ferries Act*, to demand through legislation the financial success of each and every ferry route. They might as well try to legislate the moonlight.

Incidentally, do you know of any other examples where a legislated 'essential service' is provided by a private corporation?

No, the contract isn't perfect. The hours of work are often out

of sync with the schedules. The number of 'permanent' employees are out of sync with the needs of the operation. The proportion of 'casual' employees is way too high—it takes way too long to get into the system.

But these are real solid long-term jobs, supporting families and communities. Ferry employees are entitled to job and income security and predictable pensions in return for their loyalty. They do not deserve to fear the loss of their jobs without notice through no fault of their own. They do not deserve the damage to their lives and families. And they deserve respect from the boss.

This dispute has quickly become a proxy battle in the on-going warfare of BC's polarized politics. There's no point in sacrificing a proud, experienced and dedicated labour force, and an efficient ferry service, on the altar of the unproven 'savings' and 'profits' of privatization. Forget the great privatization theories. Just provide a good service. For good government, that's ambition enough. /

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