

Minimum Wage Rates for Employees

If I may, Mr. Speaker, I should like to go back for a moment to the real purpose of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre in introducing this bill which, I think, was to set an example. If that is the idea, if the merit of this legislation is to set an example, I am just wondering if it does so.

Are we in the federal parliament in Ottawa in a position to criticize the Ontario provincial government for not implementing the progressive recommendations contained in the Goldenberg report, when the best example we can set is \$1.25? It is quoted in the Goldenberg report, and the suggestion so far as tradesmen are concerned is that the minimum should be \$2.

It is also noted that one of the most progressive provinces is British Columbia, where they have a minimum of \$1.25 for unskilled trades and \$2 for skilled trades. Perhaps we should consider, not right now but when this goes to committee, making appropriate amendments to the legislation and making its provisions wider so that at least it might set the example we want, so far as the province of Ontario is concerned, and provide a minimum of \$1.25 for unskilled labour and \$2 for tradesmen working on federal projects and under federal jurisdiction.

Again coming back to the question, are we in a position to criticize provincial administrations if we ourselves do not have an act of which we can be proud? One of the most serious things we ought to consider is making provision in the bill for \$1.25 an hour for a 40 hour week, with time and a half over 40 hours, which I believe is also the practice in British Columbia. I do not feel the legislation will accomplish its real purpose unless provision is made to that effect because, as I understand it, its real purpose as proposed by its sponsor is to set an example; and I am just wondering whether it really does that.

(Translation):

Mr. Real Caouette (Villeneuve): Mr. Speaker, the explanatory note reads as follows:

The purpose of this bill is to establish a minimum rate of wages with respect to all employees in Canada who come under federal labour legislation. This bill provides that such minimum rate of wages shall be \$1.25 per hour. The bill also provides that its terms do not affect any employee whose rate of wages is higher than the minimum established by this legislation. However, any rate of wages less favourable to employees than \$1.25 per hour is superseded by this bill.

If the bill introduced by the hon. member dealt only with a salary increase for employees in Canada, we would be 100 per cent in favour of it. However, certain clauses of

[Mr. Munro.]

the bill provide for restriction and interventions in the affairs of private enterprise and Canadian employers. For instance—

(Text):

An hon. Member: Did you read the bill—

Mr. Peters: You would be wise to read the bill.

Mr. Caouette: Yes, I read it.

Mr. Peters: You did not understand it.

Mr. Caouette: Yes I did understand it, but I feel the one who wrote it did not understand what he was writing.

(Translation):

Mr. Speaker, the bill could have provided for a minimum salary of \$1.50 instead of \$1.25 and we would gladly have endorsed the proposal.

However, the bill states that the minister concerned, or his representative, will have the right to intervene in the operations of private enterprise, to check the books and interfere with the administration of a company. That is precisely why I feel that it infringes upon freedom as we understand it in Canada.

I am in favour of setting a minimum concerning wages. Yet, there is a difference between the provinces and the federal government even if the provisions of the bill touch only upon matters which come under the central government.

In my opinion, it is not the federal government which has given birth to the Canadian provinces but the other way around. It is thanks to the provinces that Canada is a confederation today.

If a province decides—Mr. Speaker, I have just heard the hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Argue) state that that is true. That is not what he was saying about ten years ago—

(Text):

Mr. Argue: I did not say a word. I did not open my mouth.

(Translation):

Mr. Caouette: Mr. Speaker, I believe that we should, as federal representatives, leave it to the provinces—

(Text):

An hon. Member: My god, he is a Liberal.

Mr. Caouette: Yes I am, but a true liberal not a socialist liberal.

(Translation):

Is that it?

Mr. Lewis: Yes, that's it.

Mr. Caouette: Mr. Speaker, those problems come under provincial jurisdiction. Let the federal government make suggestions to the provinces at federal-provincial meetings, and I am all for it.