

*Canada Labour (Standards) Code*

the House by the Hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) to increase the proposed minimum wage under federal jurisdiction from \$1.75 to \$2 an hour. I suggest that even a \$2 minimum wage is not too much in this day and age and I would gladly have seen the amendment propose a little higher figure.

I should like to point out, as have other hon. members, that this proposal relates only to a very small proportion of the workers of Canada. It does not affect workers under provincial jurisdiction, as the bulk are, but it does cover those in the labour sphere who are under the jurisdiction of the federal parliament.

It seems to me that we often set minimum standards without really examining the problem involved. I think that the first thing that a federal government particularly should do is to set adequate income standards that it feels must be established throughout Canada. It should then set wage rates to achieve those standards over the period of a year, assuming that an individual is going to get one year's work.

I would point out to the minister and the government that the increase from \$1.65 to \$1.75 in the present bill is certainly an improvement. But it does not reach the standard we should be setting for workers all over the nation. One of the problems we are continually running into both in the provincial and in the federal sphere is that quite frequently there is a clash between the amount of money a worker can make on a given job and the amount of money he would receive if he were on welfare. The reason we are getting into so much trouble in this respect in many instances is because minimum wage rates are so low, both provincially and federally, and this problem thus comes to the surface.

I see absolutely no reason at all for not setting, first of all, adequate standards and then setting a wage rate to meet those standards. If this is not done we are never going to solve the problem of having an adequate guaranteed annual income for all workers from one end of the nation to the other.

Might I point out very briefly that with the \$1.75 minimum that the bill is going to establish a person who becomes unemployed will receive only \$46.67 by way of unemployment insurance benefits, which certainly is not adequate. Even with a \$2 rate his income from unemployment insurance, if he is unfortunate enough to become unemployed, would be \$53.33 a week, which I contend is not adequate in this day and age.

In closing, may I say that I am going to vote for this amendment since it is a decided improvement over the provision in the present bill. I urge the minister and his department to make a real examination of the income levels Canadians should have, and then to make sure that we tailor our minimum wage rates at least to meet the standard that is set.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. It being one o'clock I do now leave the Chair.

At one o'clock the House took recess.

[Mr. Harding.]

**AFTER RECESS**

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

**Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West):** This is an extremely important debate, Mr. Speaker. After listening to hon. members on the government benches and in the NDP, there can be no doubt that the \$1.75 is not adequate. We would all like to see the minimum wage set higher, but there is a requirement on members in this place to be responsible. I listened with great interest to the remarks of the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie (Mr. Murphy). He asked for leadership, but I am wondering what type of leadership he wants. Was he asking for responsible leadership or leadership that does not really matter?

Let me remind hon. members that even Mr. Donald MacDonald, who was President of the Canadian Labour Congress during the time of the committee hearings, expressed some reservation in respect of what he was asking. I think he wanted the minimum wage set at \$2 an hour effective July 1, and he further recommended \$2.50 an hour effective January 1, 1972. The most important statement he made on this subject was his admission that there were difficulties and that there was a very serious question that had to be considered. He admitted that, even though we would all like to see a minimum wage of \$2 an hour and then later increased to \$2.50, he was concerned with the implications.

• (2:10 p.m.)

I would like to read what he said, as it appears in the committee's proceedings No. 31 of Monday, June 7, 1971 at page 31:27. He stated:

We are cognizant of the difficulties which are involved in raising the minimum wage in the federal jurisdiction to the extent that it markedly outdistances the minimum wage under the various provincial jurisdictions.

My hon. friend across the way indicated that this situation would be a source of embarrassment. I do not think so, but if it were the embarrassment would not be that of the provinces, but rather of the industries which are governed by the minimum wage set by the provinces. I am still extremely interested in this subject because it seems to me to be a very difficult area. Surely, this change will make some people happy, but unquestionably it will not make the people in the city of Hamilton too happy. On the other hand, what would happen in the Atlantic provinces? Surely, the cost of living there is not that high and yet the minimum that we are talking about is still not enough, as the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie (Mr. Murphy) indicated.

During the committee hearings I questioned the minister on this subject. I said to him, in view of the implications and ramifications of this matter, have you discussed it with the provinces? We cannot move into this area alone. We cannot sit here and pick a figure out of a hat. I do not know how much thought has been given to the suggestion by the hon. members of the NDP that we increase the proposed minimum rate by 25 cents. What are the implications? I have not heard anything about