

Supply

In 1978, when the right to refuse to do hazardous work was introduced for the first time, there was concern that workers might abuse this right and that the employer could be faced with work stoppages resulting from the irresponsible or malicious use of the protection afforded. Experience has shown that these fears were unfounded and that the workers have used this right quite responsibly.

It is in the light of this experience that changes were made to the right to refuse to do hazardous work. The concept of acceptable risk or occupational danger was maintained in the provisions, but the wording is now clearer.

Refusal to work when the life or the health of someone else may be jeopardized is forbidden and restrictions to the exercise of this right have been imposed in the case of certain workers in the area of transportation to protect public health.

It is essential to a healthy economy and the welfare of Canadian workers that we constantly strive to improve all areas of occupational safety and health.

All Canadian workers, their employers and government agencies that deal with safety and health must be given the tools to do the job. In this way they will be in a position to efficiently communicate, under proactive programs to safely keep up with this decade's rapid technological and social change.

Mr. Speaker, thinking of the horrendous frequency of labour accidents, it is clear that corrective measures are an absolute necessity. When we look at the number of accidents and illnesses suffered by Canadian workers, we realize that strong steps must be taken to lessen this suffering. When the other aspects are added, productivity losses and very expensive compensation, the need for such measures becomes more acute.

Needless to say, simply amending the Act will not satisfy that need. However, the changes proposed in Bill C-34 will greatly help employers and employees better understand, share and take their joint responsibilities in the area of occupational accident prevention.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendments to Part IV of the Code are both significant and timely. As I said at the beginning of my comments, they clearly show this government's commitment and innovative approach to resolve a major problem.

I hope that all members in this House will show wisdom and objectivity and see to it that those amendments are passed into law.

● (1530)

[English]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Are there questions or comments? Debate. The Hon. Member for Winnipeg-Assiniboine (Mr. McKenzie).

Mr. Fulton: I rise on a point of order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the Hon. Member for Skeena (Mr. Fulton) rising on a point of order?

Mr. Fulton: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member for Kootenay West (Mr. Kristiansen) be now heard.

Mr. Dick: We agree, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Well, the Chair should have the motion in writing, first of all. Order.

Mr. Fulton, seconded by Mr. Blackburn moves that the Hon. Member for Kootenay West be now heard. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Carried.

Mr. Lyle S. Kristiansen (Kootenay West): Mr. Speaker, this is an interesting day. In speaking to the Opposition motion which is before us, and to refresh our minds, I will remind the House that there were two motions presented initially for consideration, one presented by the New Democratic Party and the other presented by the Progressive Conservative Party. The Speaker, in his wisdom, decided to put the motion to the Progressive Conservative Party. We have no disagreement with that, of course. We are always willing to co-operate in order to expedite the business of the House and there is no business on which we are prepared to be more willing to bend or to compromise than on a motion which attempts to advance the timetable for measures relating particularly to the occupational health and safety of Canadian workers, be they men or women. That is the purpose for which we were elected.

I do not believe that anyone in reading the record of this House of Commons over the period of the last four years could have any doubt as to the position that I myself and my colleagues in the New Democratic Party have taken. As far back as three and a half years ago we were putting questions to the Government and being assured, in the words of the former Minister of Labour—that is three Ministers of Labour back—that we would have these amendments to Parts III, IV and V placed on the Order Paper “in the near future”. That was approximately three years ago. I believe the date was June 1, 1981, if I am not mistaken. Here we are in the “near future” by Liberal definition—a very Liberal definition—and we still have not begun to debate second reading on the motion. We in this Party have been prepared to adopt almost any course of action. In fact, my House Leader, just a few days ago, on May 31, moved a motion to which I referred in questioning an Hon. Member of the Conservative Party earlier today, that we in the New Democratic Party would be prepared to move and to support that the Standing Orders be amended by adding, immediately following Standing Order 79(1), the following:

The purpose of this Standing Order is to provide for the orderly and timely consideration of Bill C-34, an Act to amend the Canada Labour Code, and to be finally disposed of no later than June 30th, 1984.

(b) When the House is considering the said legislation for second reading at the end of one day's debate, all questions necessary to dispose of it shall be put;