

has considerably increased in the last few years. Moreover, in most cases, where both husband and wife work, the woman's salary allows the family to live barely beyond the poverty level. In that perspective, it therefore seems imperative to me that in setting a minimum wage, one should be realistic and take into account, not just the needs of the workers, but also his contribution to the economy of the land.

It must be noted that by setting the minimum wage at \$1.75, we give a new incentive to the Canadian citizen to leave the ranks of the people on welfare and join those of the labour force.

I should like to touch on another subject now, namely, who pays the bill when the government increases the minimum wage? Obviously, it turns to the employer. Unfortunately, we hear too much criticism to the effect that the minimum wage will force some industries to close their plants. In this regard and without hesitation, I say that the employer who cannot guarantee his employees a vital minimum has no right to stay in business. On the other hand, on a more positive basis, the minimum wage may spur these industrialists into modernizing their equipment, into rationalizing their operations and, consequently, into putting themselves in a more favourable position to face national and international competition.

I recognize that too high a minimum wage could create unemployment. I believe the answer to this problem is to keep the minimum wage within bounds.

I have followed last night's debate with a great deal of interest. The ease with which some opposition members recommend a higher minimum wage has surprised me. Do they not know that the minimum wage that is being proposed is above that provided in any provincial legislation, and that barely a year ago, the minimum wage provided by the federal government was only \$1.25? Are they not aware of the disturbing effect of too high a minimum wage on some of the poorer areas of this country?

Obviously it is easy—and some take pleasure in doing so—to recommend a higher minimum wage than that provided in the bill. But why stop at \$2.00 per hour? Why not propose \$2.10, \$2.15 or even \$2.25? If no consideration is given to the balance between social justice and economic vitality, why should hon. members show such moderation in their suggestions?

Therefore, I would like to point out that Canadian tradition has always been favourable to the collective bargaining system, and that is felt in all labour negotiations in Canada. In my opinion, the determination of wages must normally be the result of negotiations between employers and unions, according to the rules established by government. However, since unionization is not compulsory, the government should guarantee that workers not covered by collective agreements are protected by the law. In that regard, I approve its position in determining minimum standards in a variety of cases such as severance pay, maternity leave, notices of termination of employment and hours of work.

Canada Labour (Standards) Code

[English]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

An hon. Member: I thought the member wanted the minister to reply.

Mr. Perrault: I think the understanding has been that tomorrow the minister will be granted an opportunity to make his final reply.

Some hon. Members: No.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, there was some discussion and I think there was an understanding that when we reached the point where no one else wished to speak, we would agree that debate be considered closed except for the minister's concluding speech. Of course, if anybody else wants to speak, let him do so now or forever hold his peace.

Mr. Peters: That can only happen if we call it ten o'clock.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I take it that no hon. members wish to participate in the debate at this point. As I understand it, if there is agreement there will be an order that the debate be concluded at this stage of the bill subject to the right of the Minister of Labour (Mr. Mackasey) to make a closing speech.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Peters: Then we call it ten o'clock.

Mr. Boulanger: Mr. Speaker, we are agreed on that. We are even willing to call it ten o'clock, if you like.

An hon. Member: Ten o'clock.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Crowfoot (Mr. Horner).

Mr. Horner: I would like to speak on the point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Perrault: It is not a point of order.

Mr. Horner: I understand that debate on Bill C-228 will continue when the minister returns; he will speak on second reading before the bill is referred to committee. I have reason to believe that members who are away today for reasons unknown to us may wish to speak at a later date. Will this be permitted, or is debate being held over for the sole purpose of allowing the minister to speak? I wonder if this point could be cleared up.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Jerome).

Mr. Perrault: Mr. Speaker, on the point of order—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The Chair has recognized the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council.