

Canada Labour Code

he can be protected. It is not spelled out how he will be nominated and whether all the employees or only 50 per cent will be required to nominate him. When the bill reaches the committee we will be asking the minister those questions.

I would have liked to see a number of other clauses in the bill. One of them should have dealt with the lack of training of unorganized workers elected to represent fellow workers on a safety committee. The minister should ensure that workers in plants where there is radon gas, radioactivity, or exposure to asbestos or coal dust, are trained properly so that they can operate efficiently. Even on a construction site, workers are sometimes exposed to asbestos dust in small fibre particles. I think the organized trade unionist will insist that his union gives him some training in order that he can function properly.

● (1732)

These matters can be discussed in committee, but I hope the minister is prepared to indicate the type of training that will be provided to enable these safety committees to operate properly. It is all right to say that nobody has to work in an area where there is imminent danger, but what is imminent danger? In a mine, the miner is about the only person who can really tell whether there is loose in that area which is dangerous, and if he has been working in the area for some time it is likely he will know whether the danger is imminent.

It would be difficult for the shift boss to come in and say, "I agree the danger is imminent and that you are in danger of loose falling on you." There will be some disagreement, so perhaps the committee should be charged with finding a more appropriate word than "imminent". Once it is established that there is a danger, the matter of degree will always be argued—whether it is imminent, or a large or small degree of danger. We will have to iron this one out. Because of the time lost through problems of industrial health and safety, I think we should make sure that these safety committees are established in such a way that they will offer the maximum amount of protection.

I am sure the minister will agree that changes to the bill are necessary because in many ways we are entering a totally new field. In my experience with the mining industry, the boss usually said it was his responsibility whether conditions were safe or not, and as a rule the only consideration was whether compensation would have to be paid for an accident of fatality. It was often cheaper to pay in the case of a fatality than in the case of an accident, so his understanding of what was imminently dangerous was influenced in a way that safety committees would not be.

I think the minister should indicate how often the committees should meet, and they should be required to report on a regular basis. They should also be allowed an opportunity to participate in research in relevant areas. If these suggestions are adopted, I am sure the minister will find there is co-operation from both management and employees as they come to understand the advantages of participating in an organized way.

Mr. Ray Hnatyshyn (Saskatoon-Biggar): Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a brief intervention in this debate. I appreciate that the minister has brought this legislation forward to improve the conditions of the unorganized worker, and we on this side are anxious to see the bill receive second reading and go to committee. I have had an opportunity to look at some of the provisions in the statute, and did so with the eye of a lawyer. The minister is a distinguished lawyer in his own right, of course. I must say that when I encountered such provisions in my law practice, I used to hold them up to a mirror to see if they made any more sense when read backwards.

After the minister introduced the bill yesterday, my colleague, the hon. member for Vancouver South (Mr. Fraser), referred to the credibility of the minister in matters pertaining to labour. At that time I was reminded of the story about the late John F. Kennedy. In the course of his political career, he had occasion to visit a number of steel mills and in one was stopped by a worker who asked, "When did you ever work a day in your life? What do you know about labour matters? When did you ever hold a real job?" Mr. Kennedy stumbled a bit and replied that he was sympathetic to the plight and to the aspirations of the working people of the United States. The worker is reported to have replied, "With respect to ever having a job in your life, you have not missed a thing."

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the minister that this party is interested in supporting legislation that will improve the lot of the unorganized worker in Canada. He will have our support in any attempts to improve the legislation. One of the difficulties with this kind of legislation, considering the breadth and width of our country, is that it contains provisions which are intended to have blanket application. As a westerner, I want to point out again to the minister the particular importance of the grain industry to western Canada and to pronounce a caveat with respect to it.

My colleagues, the hon. member for Dauphin (Mr. Ritchie), and the hon. member for Moose Jaw (Mr. Neil), have already brought to the attention of the minister the unique problems of the grain industry. Farming as a whole is a seasonal occupation where people are very active at certain times of the year and not so active at others. I think we must look carefully at the bill to ensure that in cases where seasonal considerations are necessary, such as the grain industry, there is a degree of flexibility available to elevator operators and people coming under federal jurisdiction. The farmers of western Canada should not be inconvenienced by the inaccessibility of elevators or other important and related industries.

In order to ensure co-operation between management and labour, we should make sure in committee that not only are applications for averaging orders made by employers, but that it is incumbent upon them to consult employees on the advisability of granting an order. The minister might entertain an amendment calling for something short of a formal vote but requiring that the employer consult the employees concerned. We often overlook the interest of the employees in legislation