

[Translation]

Mr. Roland Godin (Portneuf): Mr. Speaker, in connection with Bill C-228 now before us and entitled "An Act to amend the Canada Labour (Standards) Code", I recently received a copy of the brief of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, and I mention that I am aware of the good work done by that organization. I am grateful for their brief, but I think they insist too much on the rights of employers.

After having stated in their brief that nobody can reasonably criticize the regulations made under the Labour Code—regulations which are fair and objective—they do criticize them, wishing in fact to deny members of unions the protection given to them by the Code. The argument that employees have freely chosen a union to represent them—the provisions of the collective agreement negotiated in goodwill with the employer should prevail, and the regulations of the Labour Code should no longer apply—does not take into account the union fact.

The popular image of unions would have us believe that they have powers without compare when negotiating a collective agreement. Yet, in fact, most of them have no influence on employers. Strikes seem to occur in quick succession, but in fact unions seldom decide to strike.

Finally, in spite of what the non-syndicated imagine those organizations to be, a union seldom has power comparable to that of the employer.

So there is a lack of logic in the reasoning expressed by the Chamber of Commerce to the effect that a beautiful policy would agree with the principle whereby individuals have a say in the rules governing them.

• (12:50 p.m.)

According to this argument, the coverage offered by the Code should no longer apply to non-organized workers in order to allow them to speak their mind. The Chamber of Commerce is wrong when it implies that unions can negotiate the terms they like whereas individual workers cannot. Both are under coercion through parameters which are beyond their control, even though it must be admitted that unions can do more in this field than a worker alone.

So the Chamber of Commerce assumes that collective agreements are conducted in good faith, which is not always true. Indeed, a collective agreement is very often the result of a bitter compromise between untimely requests from the union and a stern stand by the employer. In many cases, the collective agreement does not bring out the most appropriate answer to a given situation, but reflects the balance of power of the industrial group.

Some workers may have voted against the union's certification and even though they may still be opposed to that union, they are nevertheless represented by it and their rights will be spelled out in any future collective agreement. In my view, it is unfair to deprive these people of their rights by preventing them from being

Canada Labour (Standards) Code

represented by the union they would have preferred in the first place.

This is why I cannot fully endorse the arguments put forward by the Chamber of Commerce. I think the rights under the Canadian Labour Code should be given to every worker, without regard to his affiliation to any union.

In cases where the rights given under the Labour Code are not suitable, I fully agree with the union or the employer being able to disregard its proposals. However, in general, I would like to see the provisions of the Canada Labour Code take precedence over those of the collective agreement when they are more advantageous than the latter to the workers concerned. If we go for a system other than the one proposed in the Canada Labour Code we may be affecting normal relations between employers and employees and free development of the negotiation process between parties.

The fact that the Code applies to labour—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member but after listening to him for a few moments it seems to me his remarks relate much more to the principle of the bill than to the motion before us. In fact, I think it is a statement that should have been made during second or third reading. I remind hon. members that during the report stage they must try to confine themselves to the amendments or the proposed motion. In this case, it is a motion moved by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) dealing exclusively with the minimum wage. The hon. member for Winnipeg-North-Centre suggested that the act be amended by deleting the words "one dollar and seventy-five cents," and by substituting therefor the words "two dollars an hour". It is possible, of course, that the remarks made by the hon. member for Portneuf were by way of introduction and that he will eventually bring forward in the House his comments on the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre. Anyway, I urge the hon. member for Portneuf and other hon. members to limit themselves at this stage to the consideration of the amendment.

Mr. Godin: Mr. Speaker, I shall follow your advice but I have almost finished my speech. I would like to take the opportunity to support the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre. We must admit that the minimum hourly wage rate of \$1.75 is not exaggerated, and I believe that it is quite alright that the Minister of Labour (Mr. Mackasey), who is perfectly aware of the needs of the workers and who has been himself a negotiator, should recognize the importance and the relevance of the motion proposed by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre.

Once again, I urge the minister to pay attention to these recommendations and to vote this once for the amendment side by side with the members of the opposition.

[English]

Mr. Randolph Harding (Kootenay West): Mr. Speaker, I should like to speak briefly on the amendment put before