

Canada Labour Code

contributed to or used to support a political party unless the employee has expressly so authorized in writing.

The intent of this proposal might seem fairly obvious, but what it would do, in effect, is trespass into the preserves of union responsibility. Let the men who have to run the unions and who have to vote in the unions make their own decisions, and let not the legislators decide.

The handling of internal union matters—and those matters might well include the question of financial support provided to a given political organization—should in all cases be left to the democratic processes which are duly provided in the various union constitutions. They may be imperfect, we may not agree with them, but they are still their constitutions and their rights.

There are a number of traditional precedents which support this statement. To quote from just one of them, I refer to the much respected Woods Task Force on labour relations. This task force, in a section dealing with trade unions and political action, reported, and I quote:

Historically the labour movement has always been active in politics. Individual unions have different degrees of involvement depending largely on their ideological orientation and the extent to which they are affected by government policies. Union political action may range from lobbying, through the approach of rewarding one's friends and punishing one's enemies, through the support of a particular political party.

Lobbying is legitimate. The report continues:

Today in Canada unions tend to involve themselves in the political life of the country for one or more of three reasons. The most common relates to a desire of the labour movement to improve the statutory and administrative framework of rules and regulations within which it must operate.

Beyond this, many unions are interested in the pursuit of legislative goals which will complement and supplement their gains at the bargaining table. Among these objectives are more generous social security arrangements and the vesting and funding of privately negotiated fringe benefits, particularly in the pension field. A large number of unions seek the implementation of more radical social reforms through economic and social planning.

The Woods task force went on to say many things about the union movement and the balance within the movement. It is interesting to relate that Parliament decided not to enact major proposals of the Woods task force report, which would automatically get us into the agency shop or compulsory checkoff. Parliament did not enact these recommendations because it wished to reaffirm its strongly held principle that unions in Canada should be given every encouragement and incentive to regulate their own affairs and to operate within a bare minimum of government interference.

I listened to the hon. member representing the Progressive Conservative Party say that we should outlaw this spending of money by unions on political parties without specific written notice from union members. On the other hand, representing the New Democratic Party, the hon. member for Burnaby said he thinks it is just terrible that we should even be getting into this. Because certain unions support his party he thinks it is a good idea even though in another timeframe he would support the democratic vote of individual union members. I know today why the Liberal party has the best policy. It takes the middle of the road. It is fair to both sides and does not tolerate bills such as Bill C-203.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lyle S. Kristiansen (Kootenay West): Mr. Speaker, in the brief couple of minutes available to me I would like to touch on just a couple of things. First, the union I have been associated with is perhaps the most politically active and involved plant, of the most politically active local union, of the most politically active union as a whole in Canada, the IWA. I have been the financial secretary of that local union for the past year. I signed some of the cheques to which my friend probably takes exception, and I can assure him that democracy is no healthier anywhere than it is within that particular local union. I have been one of its officers ever since 1972, and we stand vigorously to defend the rights of Socreds, Liberals or Tories in our membership who want to speak out against our actions and policies at local union conventions. We have continuously paid affiliation to the New Democratic Party since its founding in 1961 on the basis of a proportion of our membership. Whether or not people sign out, they are guaranteed that moneys are not paid on everyone's behalf because we recognize that everyone does not support the same party.

I think we have to look at this bill not in isolation but together with private member's Bill C-267 in the name of the hon. member for Prince George-Peace River (Mr. Oberle) which basically is a right-to-work bill. I think those two things taken together lead us to understand better from whence all this comes. There is a poem, which I do not have time to read, called "The Free Rider's Psalm," which seems to me to relate to an attack on the labour movement. The principle that is implicit in this bill follows the same principle which chooses to attack all of the labour movement and the right to collective democratic action, as enunciated in the private member's bill of my friend's colleague. I oppose the bill, Mr. Speaker, and I believe I can now call it six o'clock.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Order, please. The hour provided for the consideration of private members' business having expired, I do now leave the chair until eight o'clock this evening.

At 6 p.m. the House took recess.

● (2000)

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.