

Supply—Labour

The minister is perhaps mistaken when he says he feels there is a general recognition of the right and need of free collective bargaining in a free society. Let me suggest to the committee that this is a right which has been far from recognized. Most of the tumult and turmoil that engaged the attention of parliament within the last year or so had its origin in the fact that the right of collective bargaining and the rights of the working people as individuals have not been recognized by industries in the country which are opposed to such rights. All the evidence arising from those disputes and the kind of action that parliament took in those emergencies bears out the fact that there is a basic desire on the part of employers in this country to deny if possible the full and free rights of collective bargaining.

Reference has been made to a number of reports we have received. Perhaps I might make reference to the report made by Hon. C. Rhodes Smith in respect of the dispute on the west coast in the longshoring industry. As I read the evidence and arguments advanced before Mr. Justice Smith against the position which was being taken by the foremen involved, it seemed that the tenor of the employer's presentation was to deny the rights of those people to have free collective bargaining in the manner in which they sought to have it.

When one moves into this area one immediately becomes involved quite legitimately in philosophical questions. My colleague, the hon. member for Winnipeg North, made reference to the task force. The minister and others have already made reference to the Freedman report. The question arises as to why we need all these studies, particularly the so-called task force study. I suggest that the only real reason the minister and his colleagues need this task force at the present time, after the experience of last year, is that they really do not know where they are going or they are deliberately indulging in stalling with a desire in fact to delay the recognition of the rights of free individuals in a free society and what the minister has described as the group right of collective bargaining.

This brings us right back to what I feel is a basic question in our society, namely, which has priority, the right of property or the right of person? This is a basic battle that has been going on at least since the industrial revolution which came about in a world where certain concepts of property rights were already well established and ingrained in the

outlook and philosophy of the people who were at the top of society.

• (3:40 p.m.)

In my opinion we do not need a task force at this time. We have the knowledge and experience necessary so that parliament can come to grips with any changes in labour legislation that are required. This is particularly so if we have a clear concept of where we are going and if parliament is clearly prepared, as I am, to put the right of person before the right of property and to recognize what is perhaps axiomatic, that all wealth arises from the application of the mind and muscle of man through ability, training and experience. Without that application of human effort there is no wealth and there is no sustenance.

This is the crux of the question and this is why I was disturbed when the minister commenced his discussion of his estimates by saying that we now have time to catch our breath. In making that comment I can appreciate the minister's personal feeling about having a little time to catch his breath after the experience he had during the earlier months of his tenure in this portfolio. But what concerns me is that the Minister of Labour and his department are once again being shoved off to the periphery, as it were of the main operations of parliament. We are moving back to what seems to be our normal position where pronouncements like the one made today by the Minister of Trade and Commerce are much closer to the centre of attention.

If I may say so without any desire to give personal offence, I believe my contention in this connection is borne out by the tenor of the remarks I have listened to so far from speakers representing the official opposition. Their remarks have shown quite clearly a recognition on their part that property still is and still should have prior right over the rights of people.

Mr. Pugh: Oh, fiddle.

Mr. Barnett: That is the only conclusion I can draw from the tenor of the remarks made. The minister really has not made his own position clear. I believe him when he says he recognizes the idea of free collective bargaining in a free society. But he does not really come to grips with definitions of what is free collective bargaining, what is a free society and who is to have freedom for what.