

*Canada Labour (Standards) Code*

• (4:20 p.m.)

What impressed me in the committee discussions on this bill was that, in general, there seemed to be agreement that this was good legislation. Basically, it is an improvement over what we now have. What frightened me was that the tenor of all the statements was: "This is good legislation, but..." The "buts" to me were very important because they meant that all these parties recognized that the legislation depended largely on the regulations. This is legislation by regulation.

The representatives of the Canadian Trucking Association were bitterly opposed to some of the clauses in the bill, but they agreed that in the past the department had been reasonable in its interpretation of the regulations. We can only hope this will apply in the case of the new legislation.

My reason for speaking briefly at this time is to give my approval in principle to the bill while urging the officials in the department and the minister to respect the wishes of the various people who have made submissions. I know they are well aware of the affairs of the various parties concerned. I hope they will take due note of their representations since the success of the legislation will depend on intelligent regulations being made by the minister and his department.

**Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Mr. Speaker, as I indicated this morning when we began the report stage of this bill, it is a bill which meets with our general approval. There is nothing in it which we oppose. Any criticisms we make of it are on the score that it does not go far enough in certain respects. Since we do spend a great deal of time on this side of the House berating the government for its blunders and mistakes, bad legislation and all the rest, perhaps we shall be forgiven if we say on this occasion that the measure before us is a good piece of legislation. It may be hard to take on the benches over there, and some supporters of the government may wonder whether there is a catch in all this. But I speak as one who for many years tried to get legislation introduced on the matters which make up the Canada Labour Code, only to be told time and time again that we could not have it. At long last, though, we did get the Canada Labour (Standards) Code and the Canada Labour (Safety) Code. Now, we are at the stage of accepting this legislation as permanent and seeking to make improvements in it.

The bill before us, which we shall soon pass and send to the other place, deals with the questions of minimum wage, equal pay, maternity leave, group termination of employment, severance pay, garnishment of wages and one or two other matters. In all respects, the things this bill does improve the legislation and we welcome it.

The last speaker said something about regulations, indicating that even good legislation could be defective in practice if the regulations fell short of the intent of Parliament. I must say there has been some shortcomings of that kind with respect to this legislation. For example, the law permits the government to allow deferments in certain areas. In our view, far too many such deferments

[Mr. Thomas (Moncton).]

have been granted. On the whole, though, it is good to have this legislation which does improve the position of the working people. The bill does so directly, of course, only for the 10 per cent or so of the working force which is covered by federal labour jurisdiction but there is a process of osmosis which goes on; as the federal government improves its labour legislation those improvements find their way into most provincial labour statutes.

Having gone this long saying things which might be called praise, may I now revert to type and get back into my own character by saying I regret very much that the minister did not have whatever he needed to go through with the better minimum wage rate, with an ease in the number of general holidays sometimes known as statutory holidays with pay, together with an increase in the number of weeks of vacation with pay provided under the act.

May I refer first of all to the minimum wage. We had a fairly good debate on the matter today at the report stage. I noticed that in discussing one of the amendments the Minister of Labour (Mr. Mackasey) said he could not accept its formula, which would tie increases down to a percentage of the rate which has been established, because—and I took the hon. gentleman's words down—the minimum had not yet reached an acceptable level. I notice the minister is nodding his head, indicating I have quoted him correctly. I believe he agrees with me. He put up the best case he could for the \$1.75 an hour, but I dare to believe that as a man with the interests of labour at heart he would much prefer to see that figure \$2 an hour. I must say that all the arguments to the effect that we have to be responsible, that we have to figure out where the money is coming from, leave me cold. I do not see why the brunt of preserving federalism, maintaining a responsible society and all that sort of thing should always be borne by those at the bottom of the scale. We do not hear these arguments when raising the salaries of judges to astronomical figures; we did not hear these arguments from the majority when hon. members were raising their own salaries a short while ago. I do not think it sounds well to employ this kind of argument with respect to the minimum wage.

Well, here we are at the third reading stage of the bill. The rate is now to be \$1.75. It used to be \$1.65 and before that it was \$1.25. The level which is now proposed is really nothing to be proud of. I wish the minister had seen fit to make provision for a minimum wage of \$2 an hour. It has been said across the way that if we had agreed to making it \$2 an hour I would have been asking for \$2.50. Well, that does not shock me. When I was asking for \$1.25 I was told that if I had been given \$1.25 I would have wanted \$1.50. As a matter of fact, the Canadian Labour Congress which has supported the position of \$2 at this time, has already said that six months or a year from now the rate ought to be \$2.50. If progress does consist in getting a chance at a little better standard of living, I think such a chance should obtain for all our people not just for those in the middle and upper income brackets.