

Canada Labour (Standards) Code

figure of \$1.25 an hour to a higher figure. But in the name of those people who are affected, and in a desire to be fair and to have some kind of just society, let us not stop there. Let us make it fair and reasonable. The other day one of the members of the committee complained about my amendment because he was afraid that if \$2 an hour were agreed to this year, then in a year or two I would be asking for \$3 or \$4 an hour. I probably will be; in fact, I hope I will be. Progress does not stop. But it is not an answer to people who are living below the poverty line to tell them that for reasons of realism, of sophistication or of procedural difficulty, they have to stay at the same level.

• (4:00 p.m.)

Mr. Speaker, the members of this House of Commons are sometimes shoved aside and sometimes feel irrelevant, but this afternoon we have the opportunity to act on behalf of 20,000 or 25,000 people. Therefore, I urge that this House support my motion, and by doing so let us raise the minimum wage in the Canada Labour (Standards) Code to the more reasonable level of \$2 an hour.

Hon. Bryce Mackasey (Minister of Labour): I never cease to wonder at the political skill and acumen of the hon. member, having myself been a member of this House since 1962. I notice that in anticipation of my arguments he either paid attention to what I had said on second reading or in committee or else reread my remarks in *Hansard*. I do recall the hon. member saying, with his refreshing candour, during the second reading stage that had I come up with \$2 for a minimum wage I would now be faced with an amendment for \$2.25.

An hon. Member: What is wrong with that?

Mr. Mackasey: Not a thing, except that you must be consistent. Had I brought in \$2, he would have proposed \$3, and he would never be satisfied. In proposing \$1.65, I had to ignore some of the political arguments and some of the very humanitarian aspects in the hon. member's remarks. I must, in all fairness to the hon. gentleman, take into consideration that he is consistently in this field and is genuinely and sincerely concerned about the people to whom he referred.

However, I think the hon. member will be the first to agree that that concern is not limited to him or to members of his party. There are no basic differences between the hon. member's arguments advancing his

amendment and his speech on second reading or in committee the other day, nor will I attempt to come up with any different arguments in rebuttal. As I recall the debate on second reading, the one encouraging factor of course was the unanimous theme running through all the speeches made by members of all the parties in the House, including the Official Opposition, that there should and must be some increase in the minimum wages in this country. Had I viewed the minimum wage as the only instrument to alleviate poverty for certain classes of people, possibly I would have come up to \$2. But when you are a minister charged with a certain responsibility you do not always have the freedom and flexibility that you may have in the opposition in taking into consideration one or two points.

Certainly, politically at least, it would be very palatable, so far as the relationship of the Minister of Labour and the government to 10,000 or 20,000 people is concerned, to bring in an amendment suggesting \$3 an hour as the minimum wage. If I had that freedom, I would have proposed more than \$2 an hour because it is certainly politically attractive. But as I mentioned on second reading and in committee, I have certain responsibilities and I have many other considerations which I thought I made as clear as possible.

We heard some very valuable contributions from representatives of the Atlantic provinces regarding the whole question of minimum wages. I think that in all the speeches on second reading some myths were dispelled which exist all too often in central Canada that the cost of living is so much lower in the Atlantic provinces. The fact that the people there can exist on a lower income is hardly a valid argument, but, as I pointed out earlier in the debate, I am opposed to the concept of regional minimum wages, either within a province or in a province within the nation.

So, in searching for a suitable figure, it became very obvious to me that I must come up with one that created the usual incentive, and the leadership with which the federal government has been associated ever since 1965 in establishing a minimum wage. I also had to establish a figure that did not create a distortion within a province or create unnecessary hardships for marginal industries, which may briefly be described as labour oriented rather than capital oriented. I was not unaware of the fact, through research in certain provinces, not necessarily the Atlantic provinces, that an increase in the