

Minimum Wage Rates for Employees

Mr. Starr: That is because there is a Liberal administration there.

Mr. Chaplin: Nova Scotia has its own system which I have not translated to an hourly basis. In New Brunswick the figure is 50 cents an hour. Quebec has a spread in rates in various zones, those rates being 60 cents, 55 cents, and 50 cents an hour. In Ontario the figures for female employees only are \$22, \$20 and \$18 a week in the various zones. In Manitoba the figures are 60 cents, 58 cents and 54 cents an hour. In Saskatchewan the minimum rates are \$30 and \$29 a week.

An hon. Member: Not Saskatchewan?

Mr. Chaplin: In Alberta the figure is \$30 a week for male employees in one category. There are other categories which I do not think it is necessary to refer to for purposes of this discussion. I think the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre is quite right when he says that in all these areas the minimum wage is much too low and should be improved. None of these figures are very good, and that includes Saskatchewan. The hon. member has talked about a minimum of \$1.25 an hour on a very restricted basis; but we see that in Saskatchewan, as I have indicated, the rates work out to 70 and 75 cents an hour. With a socialist government there one would have thought that after all these years they could have done a little better than that. With the influence that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre must have with the government of Saskatchewan, surely he could have persuaded them to adopt a more progressive attitude in this field than they have shown to date.

In all fairness to the hon. member I think I should say I realize that Saskatchewan is not heavily industrialized and perhaps the minimum wage they have adopted is satisfactory for their purposes, but it does seem to me that the point at which this problem should be tackled is at the provincial level.

One other matter that the hon. member has obviously overlooked is that with the way in which this house is at present constituted there is always the possibility and the danger that members opposite might be returned to office. If they did form a government and if they continue in the manner in which they have been talking recently, if they continue to downgrade Canada and live up to those dire forecasts they are so fond of making, we will find that a minimum wage of \$1.25 will be much too high because no industry in this country will be able to afford to pay it.

As far as the bill is concerned, I do not feel that it has any real or practical application. Nevertheless, because I believe in the principle involved and because I believe that

[Mr. Chaplin.]

minimum wages generally across the country should be improved, I do not want to appear to be negative in this matter. As I have said previously, I believe that this problem should be attacked through the provinces, and I think it would not be out of the way to expect this government to use its good offices to approach the provinces with a view to trying to persuade them to equalize and improve the minimum wage position across the country. I recognize the fact that all of the provinces are not in the same stage of development and it might indeed be difficult to get all of them to agree to a standard minimum wage. However, I believe that with a discussion under the leadership of the present government, I would hope, and with an approach of that kind we could at least close the gap in this regard and get higher minimum wages for the people of this country.

Mr. Speaker: Does the hon. member for York South want to ask the member a question?

Mr. Brewin: The hon. member for Greenwood; and I wanted to ask the hon. member a question, if I may before he takes his seat.

Mr. Speaker: If he wishes to answer.

Mr. Brewin: Does the hon. member wish to answer?

Mr. Chaplin: I will try.

Mr. Brewin: The question is this: The hon. member says he is in favour of the principle of the bill but, as I understand it, for constitutional reasons believes it is not broad enough to cover the whole field. The question I should like to put to him is, does he not think that half a loaf is better than no bread? Does he not think a good principle ought to be put into effect in the field over which this parliament has jurisdiction?

Mr. Chaplin: I am sorry, could I have the latter part of that question again?

Mr. Brewin: Does the hon. member not think that a good principle ought to be put into effect in the field over which this parliament has jurisdiction? He said this bill had a good principle, and I asked him if he does not think it ought to be put into effect where this parliament has, in fact, jurisdiction?

Mr. Chaplin: All I can say to the hon. member is that the number of people directly involved in this bill is actually so small that I think it is negligible.

Mr. Lewis: Where would the harm be in having this legislation on the statute books?