

Canada Labour (Standards) Code

Mr. Murphy: Any provincial government that attempts to seduce industry with slave labour should be forced into an embarrassing position. It should be forced to debate the matter before the people of those provinces, not in the confines of cabinet rooms or local provincial legislatures. As the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre pointed out, we in this House should be leaders in this field, not followers. We cannot sit around and wait for the ten provinces to get together to bring wages up bit by bit until they reach a proper level. We must be the leaders.

The provincial governments will never get together because of interprovincial rivalries. A premier of the province of Newfoundland may not want to increase the minimum wage because certain industries may leave that province and move to Nova Scotia. A premier of Nova Scotia will not increase his minimum wage for the same reason. The industries in his province may move to Quebec, and so on. The interprovincial rivalries are too deepseated. This will continue for time immemorial if the provinces are left to their own devices. We must be the leaders. We can do this by increasing the minimum wage in the federal area to a figure that is at least a bit above the defined poverty line.

Another argument is that there has been no political pressure on either the federal or provincial legislatures for a larger increase. If this bill passes, it will be argued that we have increased the minimum wage from \$1.25 to \$1.75 within one year. It will be argued that within one year the minimum wage was increased by 50 cents an hour. That may be true, Mr. Speaker, but we must consider the length of time that has elapsed since the minimum wage was increased to \$1.25. If we calculate 6 per cent per year during that period, we will see how the government arrived at the figure of \$1.75 per hour. The calculation works out at 6 per cent or within hundredths of a percentage point of that.

• (12:40 p.m.)

I know that guidelines were set last year or the year before indicating that we should keep all increases to 6 per cent. But it is significant that when these guidelines were set wage earners earning less than \$2.50 an hour were supposedly excluded from the effects of those guidelines. To establish guidelines at the bottom of the heap for those people is unfair. They are not organized and can exert no political pressure. The only political pressure which can be applied on their behalf must be applied in this chamber.

Another argument which will be made is that the \$1.75 will constitute the highest minimum wage in the western hemisphere, at any rate, higher than in the United States where the minimum wage is \$1.60. As far as the United States is concerned, may I say that we do not have in this country a southern power bloc which takes advantage of slave labour. It is nothing more than that. That is the only reason the minimum wage is not higher in the United States. The southern bloc of both Democrats and Republicans is able to exert sufficient pressure on the government to maintain the minimum wage at a dis-

[Mr. Murphy.]

graceful level in that country. I hope it does not happen here.

It will also be said that the new minimum wage will be higher than it is in the provinces. I do not believe we should take satisfaction in standing here and feeling like a giant among pygmies. We are only five feet tall compared with the pygmies and we may feel big. But we should be six feet tall.

The 6 per cent guideline has been respected. It has been respected by the government in its application to the particular wage group to which I have referred. Where else has it been respected in labour negotiations? I know of no area, with the possible exception of some sections of the Public Service, where organized labour has been prepared to accept a 6 per cent increase in the past few years. In London a few days ago the electricians signed a new contract which will give them a \$2.53 an hour raise; they will end up getting \$8.82 an hour over a two-year period. This will constitute a 40 per cent increase in salaries over the two-year period. These electricians will be performing services somewhere. They will work in houses in London. No doubt there are people in London working at the minimum wage. Those people will be charged the same \$8.82 an hour as the organized workers will be charged, or the businessmen or the professional men.

These people at the bottom face increases in costs every day. The only people who can give them an increase are the members of this chamber and if we tie them down at the bottom we are doing nothing more than perpetuating poverty. Unions and governments do not respect differentials of area, areas of slow development or backward areas. When the government negotiates contracts with postal workers it does not pay less to workers in Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia or Quebec than it does to postal workers in Toronto or Vancouver. When the railways companies negotiate contracts with workers in the Maritimes or in areas of slow development, the workers employed under those contracts do not receive less than their counterparts in provinces such as Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia where standards are higher. But because of provincial bickering we expect that these poor people at the bottom, those who are in a depressed area, so to speak, should remain depressed and work for less wages than is the case anywhere else.

The only question we should ask ourselves is: what is a fair minimum wage? Never mind the provinces. Never mind the United States. To my mind, \$2 is a fair minimum wage. This raise of 25 cents an hour adds up to a full \$624 a year if worked out on the basis of a 40-hour week and 52 weeks a year. The poor man who works for this rate will receive \$4,160 a year, between \$150 and \$300 above the poverty line established by the Economic Council of Canada and other organizations. Surely we in this House can afford to legislate an increase of \$624 a year to those working under its jurisdiction.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!