under federal jurisdiction should enjoy the same rights with respect to occupational safety and health. At the present time, the federal Government's legislative authority is based on a large number of Acts, which engenders uncertainty and creates considerable differences in the type of protection offered to workers. Repeatedly various groups have tried to put an end to this fragmentation, and I am thinking of the Special Committee of the House of Commons on Regulatory Reform, the Economic Council of Canada, and a number of labour organizations.

To correct this situation, the Bill before the House today provides that occupational safety and health provisions will apply also to all employees under federal jurisdiction. Mr. Speaker, this means that about 300,000 more employees will now be protected under Part IV, if the Bill is adopted. In fact, what we are proposing is that Part IV of the Canada Labour Code should now cover all employees in marine, air and railway transport and all employees working for interprovincial pipelines or on offshore oil rigs on the east and west coasts and in the North.

Needless to say, the existing procedures for ensuring safety of operations and public safety remain unchanged. Furthermore, the federal Government proposes to amend the Financial Administration Act, in that as far as occupational safety and health is concerned, the federal Government will no longer be a self-regulating employer. For the first time, the Government of Canada, in its capacity as an employer, will be subject to the rules imposed by Parliament on other employers. Consequently, Canadian public servants will enjoy the same rights as employees in the private sector.

• (1120)

Although they are important, the proposed changes are, I feel, only the first step towards creating a climate of cooperation at the national and local level, with a view to preventing accidents in the work place and occupational illness.

At the national level, involvement in developing programs will be increased through the creation of an advisory council, composed mainly of union and management representatives. Its mandate will be to advise the Minister of Labour on policies, the administration of the Act and the development legislation.

At the local level, direct involvement in the compliance process will be achieved through joint safety and health committees. A few committees are already in place. To broaden representation and consultation in this area, the Bill before the House today provides for the establishment of committees in all businesses where twenty or more workers are employed. The committees shall be composed of an equal number of employer and employee representatives. In cases where the nature of the work is relatively risk-free and it is possible to prove there is no risk of accident or illness, exceptions may be considered.

Mr. Speaker, I must say that these compulsory committees will have a very important role to play in encouraging employers and employees to recognize their responsibilities and to make an effort to prevent accidents in the work place.

In small businesses with fewer than twenty workers and where committees are not compulsory, we still want a representative to be appointed who will act as liaison officer between employees and the employer. With more or less the same powers and responsibilities as the committee, the representative shall ensure that employees participate as required in resolving occupational safety and health issues.

Another amendment to Part IV concerns the right to refuse to work in case of imminent danger. When in 1978, it was suggested that workers be given the right to refuse to do work that might put their safety or health at risk, there was some concern that there might be abuse. That I think explains the very conservative wording of the Act.

However, experience at both federal and provincial levels has shown that workers have exercised this right responsibly. However, the wording of Part IV, and especially the expression "imminent danger", has created some ambiguity as to the kind of work one might refuse to do. For the sake of clarity, we are proposing in this Bill to delete the qualifier "imminent" while the word "danger" will be defined in the Definitions section of the Act.

Furthermore, provisions concerning normal occupational risks and cases where public safety takes precedence over the exercise of this right have been reformulated to be compatible with the expanded application of the Act.

The provisions concerning enforcement, as well as the administrative policies with respect to those provisions, have been revised to improve compliance with Part IV and thus prevent accidents in the work place and occupational illness.

Those legislative provisions have been drafted so as to take into consideration the Canadian Government's policy to decriminalize federal laws. In keeping with that policy prepared under the auspices of my colleague, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada (Mr. MacGuigan), the Government undertakes to limit its recourse to the Criminal Code.

Therefore, Part IV will promote among employers and employees voluntary respect for the law and the joint settlement of issues. If need be, the provisions concerning respect for the law will also be reviewed so that they will be used more properly.

We firmly believe that work safety problems will be solved and accidents at work considerably reduced through good will and joint responsibility of both employer and employee. No matter what kind of legislation we have, it stands to reason that accidents cannot be eliminated through laws, but we feel that the approach we recommend in this Bill is good and will