

Canada Labour Code

do not want to belong and if they do not want to be members, that is their right.

As to the suggestion of the hon. member a while ago that these members are forced to pay contributions to a certain political party, I hope he is intelligent enough to know that that statement is not correct. In this day and age when we are trying to move things forward in terms of employer-employee relationships, the hon. member has done a disservice by bringing in this bill.

In the course of the speech made by the hon. member for Kent-Essex, there was a question from this side of the House about the Post Office. That was supposed to flatten the argument made by the hon. member for Kent-Essex. As an aside I would like to make the point that one of the reasons there is so much difficulty in labour relations, with regard to the Post Office, is because the members of the postal unions have been unhappy that their labour relations are not governed by the Canada Labour Code. They come under the Public Service Staff Relations Act. They do not feel that legislation fits an industrial operation such as theirs. Thus, any suggestion that the troubles in the Post Office constitute a reflection on the Canada Labour Code is one which fails to take these facts into recognition.

The bill which has been put in this afternoon is not in the interests of improving labour relations in this country. I am glad I held back and let an hon. member from the other side speak first, because the position I take would be assumed in this House. It has been a pleasure to hear such a good statement on the position of trade unions by the hon. member for Kent-Essex, and I hope the House will reject this ill-advised bill in one way or another.

● (1640)

Mr. John A. Fraser (Vancouver South): Mr. Speaker, in rising to take part in the debate on the private bill introduced by my colleague and fellow member of my party, the hon. member for Prince George-Peace River (Mr. Oberle), I want to speak quietly but to make some comments which will be of help in the debate taking place this afternoon.

First of all I have to say with reluctance, because the bill is introduced by a colleague of mine, that, as the labour critic in Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, I cannot agree with the bill. But, having said that, I think it is also fair to say that the bill represents a point of view which is, in many respects, increasing in many parts of our society, and I think it behooves everybody here not to take the attitude that this issue should not be debated but rather to ask why it is that an hon. member on this side of the House who, I happen to know, has business interests in the province of B.C., who employs workmen and has an excellent record of employment, feels compelled to introduce this bill and to open this debate in the Chamber this afternoon. It is no use saying that the issue which my friend has raised by introducing the bill is not one that concerns people in the country, because it most certainly does.

My friend has made reference to certain studies and polls, and I can assure you that I have seen these studies and polls as

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

well. I have also had occasion to talk with strong trade union people who, reacting out of frustration and anger, sometimes to situations within their particular unions, have said that maybe union leaders would be better union leaders if there were no closed shop. The reason that I am saying there is no use avoiding the issue is that the issue is there, it is in the country. I am saying this as the labour critic in the official opposition.

I am saying that I cannot support the bill for several reasons. First of all, in the vast majority of unions in this country democracy functions, and it functions well. The strike record that we had had in Canada,—which has improved recently—was extremely serious 18 months ago. I see some hon. members on the government side nodding in agreement. It may very well be serious again, but I am not sure, and I am not persuaded from anything that I have learned that this bill would necessarily eliminate strikes in this country or eliminate the incidence of strikes.

The problems that have created much of the industrial strife in this country have little to do with the so-called right to work laws. They have to do with a number of other things. In 1975 they had to do with the fact that, if you take a look at the figures, labour's share of the gross national product was declining, wage demands were increasing because costs were increasing, and any good labour leader, including Mr. Morris of the CLC, will be quick to point out that one of the reasons why costs were going up was that inflation was taking hold and, as Mr. Morris has said repeatedly, the blame for that lay very much in this Chamber because the government was printing money beyond productivity and inducing a good deal of domestic inflation.

When we look at the situation in the management-labour world in this country and when we take the time to speak with and listen to both sides, we find an amazing amount of common sense, if you can put these people in some room where their common sense statements will not be reported by the media. The average labour leader in this country lives in a highly political and sometimes very difficult world within his or her own union, and the long history in this country of a militant adversary system has made it extremely difficult for many labour leaders to be what I could call "reasonable" because they are afraid of being attacked by their own rank and file as not being tough with the boss.

On the other side of the coin is the fact that a good many people in management have, for too long, dealt at arm's length with trade union representatives, trade union leaders, or through people who are hired to do all the negotiating, and often management has been too far removed from the bargaining table.

I suppose that another cause of some of the strife has been that expectations in this country have, for some time, run ahead of the reality of the situation, although having said that I recognized that there are some people who believe there is no limit and that increases on an annual basis can go on forever. Let me assure all hon. members that the most sensible and responsible people within the trade union movement today