

Minimum Wage Rates for Employees

parliament. That ruling, of course, was given because Mr. Bennett's legislation endeavoured to enact a minimum wage that would apply to all workers in Canada, whether they came under federal or provincial labour jurisdiction. This bill avoids that pitfall. Like the government's bill providing for annual vacations with pay, this bill applies only to those employees who come under federal labour jurisdiction.

I suggest that not only is it strange that in 1962 there should still be no legislation of this kind on the federal statute books but that it is most unfortunate that the minimum wage legislation in our provinces is such a patchwork. Not only is there no uniformity; the tragedy is that in at least three of our provinces there are no effective pieces of legislation or regulations so far as male employees are concerned. Those three provinces are Ontario, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. In all of the provinces there are some provisions with regard to minimum wages, but in most cases they apply only to female employees or only in various regions or districts. There is a great lack of uniformity in these regulations. Furthermore, the figures that are set down as minimum wage rates are, in my view, far too low. Therefore, I think that the time is ripe for the federal parliament to give a lead to the provinces by enacting this minimum wage law for those who come under federal labour jurisdiction, and in so doing, making it a law that is worth something.

In this day and age the wages for our people should be much higher than is proposed in this bill. Certainly the figure suggested in this bill, namely \$1.25 an hour, is the least that we should countenance as a minimum. That is the reason I propose this bill, Mr. Speaker. We surely need it in the federal field. I suggest that the time has come for the federal government to give a lead to the provinces right across this country. If we were to take this step of establishing a minimum wage at the federal level, at a reasonable figure such as \$1.25 an hour, I feel satisfied that on the part of the provinces there would be a tendency to follow suit.

This consideration, of course, reminds one of an argument we have frequently had in this house as to whether we should lead or follow the provinces. It all depends on whose bill is up for consideration which side of that argument various spokesmen may take. However, I will say this, to the credit of this government and also to the credit of the former government. There are some instances in the labour field in which the federal parliament has taken the lead and the results have been all to the good. Therefore because

[Mr. Knowles.]

it is sound, right and humane, I hope that we shall accept this legislation. As it would give a lead to the provinces, I also say that I hope we shall not delay.

At one time or another all parties have indicated their support for the principle of a minimum wage. As a matter of fact, in the 1957 election campaign the Conservatives had a good deal to say about the overhauling they would do of federal labour legislation. To be specific, the Prime Minister (Mr. Diefenbaker) then the leader of the opposition, in that campaign promised that legislation providing for minimum wages would be introduced. That was 1957. It is now 1962 and we still have not that legislation. There was not so much said about it, of course, in specific terms in the two succeeding elections but the 1957 promise remains unfulfilled. By this bill I am giving to the Conservative members of this house the opportunity to fulfil their promise of 1957. It is also an opportunity given to the Liberals and to the Social Crediters to fulfil promises they have made to the Canadian people as well.

In 1957 I had the privilege of presenting a bill which was almost identical to the one that is now before us. On that occasion, of course, I reminded the Conservatives of the promises they had made in the election campaign. I was told by various spokesmen on the Conservative side of the house that there was nothing wrong in principle with my bill but that I should not be quite so impatient; that after all the government was that year bringing in one piece of labour legislation and others would follow. I have read again with interest the debate of 1957 and I find that a number of those on the Conservative side of the house literally said to me, "Just do not get in a rush; leave this matter to us and we will do it". That was 1957. It is now 1962 and as yet no proposal has come forward from the government side for legislation of this kind.

I therefore hope that this bill will be looked upon as an opportunity to do something that should be done for the Canadian people, to give a lead to the provinces and to put on the statute books a principle that all four parties in this house support.

I repeat what I said in the opening part of my remarks, Mr. Speaker, namely that I am not necessarily wedded to all of the details in this bill. As a matter of fact, we are precluded by the rules from referring to or discussing the clauses in it. I have tried with assistance to work out a bill that has the mechanics in it and I think they are good. However, I should be quite happy to have in the committee on industrial relations a full discussion with regard to the mechanics of it. I should be quite happy if in that