

Canada Labour Code

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby): Mr. Speaker, it was very gratifying to see that small standing ovation on the other side for my friend who just spoke.

I too rise to oppose Bill C-203 presented today by the hon. member for York North (Mr. Gamble). I say, in commencing, that this bill represents an insult not only to the union movement of this country but to all working people who have chosen to join unions to defend their rights. We in the New Democratic Party are proud to be associated with the trade union movement and proud to receive the support that we have received from them. I would point out that it has been the union movement in this country that fought, in many cases long before Parliament, for civil liberties, a safe and decent work place, a healthy work place, a fair share of the wealth that is generated in the work place and to ensure that the strength of working people together is represented when they come up against what is becoming an increasingly more concentrated corporate sector.

● (1730)

This bill harkens back to the days of W.A.C. Bennett in the province of British Columbia who, when the New Democratic Party was being formed, brought in legislation which banned outright any contributions on the part of the trade union movement to any political party. Of course, that was a back-door way of getting at the New Democratic Party and preventing any money from the trade union movement being processed to the NDP.

There is a suggestion in this private member's bill that somehow the union movement is not responsible and that somehow it is perhaps abusing its rights in collecting funds and duly deciding how those funds will be expended. I would point out that democracy exists within the trade union movement to a far greater extent than it does within the corporate sector. In many cases in the corporate sector the decisions are made behind closed doors by a board of directors who often are not responsible to anyone but themselves.

In the union movement, before any decisions are made to spend money in an election or any other major expenditure of funds takes place, a democratic vote is taken of the membership of the particular local. It is only following such a vote that the funds are expended in the direction that is desired. Is it any wonder that it is the New Democratic Party and not the Liberal party or Conservative party which is the beneficiary of these funds?

One only has to look at the track record of the Conservatives, for example, in Nova Scotia, which smashed the movement that is attempting to organize Michelin Tire. One has only to look at the Liberal record. My friend talked about how the Liberal party supports the union movement and encourages them to bargain collectively.

It was the Liberal party that brought in wage controls. It said it was all right to bargain collectively so long as you did not try to get more than a certain percentage of the wage. That iniquitous piece of legislation will be remembered for a long time by the working people of this country.

It is no surprise that members of the trade union movement, members of union locals in many parts of this country, have voted to support the party which has gone out of its way to ensure that the voices of ordinary men and women are heard in the councils of this country at the highest levels, and has been responsive to the concerns expressed by those working men and women.

A democratic vote is taken by the members of the local. I would point out that virtually all union constitutions go beyond that. Not only is there a requirement that there be a vote before any funds are expended of a political party, but virtually all union constitutions have a provision whereby any member who pays dues and does not wish to see his or her dues being used to support a particular political party can have a portion of those dues returned. What we have is the union movement in a democratic manner doing exactly what the hon. member for York North is suggesting be imposed upon them by legislation.

I point to a typical provision of a union constitution. This happens to be in the constitution of the labourers union, section 4:

Any dues paying member or person who pays dues or agency fees pursuant to union security provisions of a collective bargaining agreement shall be entitled to a rebate of the portion thereof which has been expended for political causes to which such person objects.

That kind of provision is found in virtually all trade union constitutions. I suggest that if we are looking for democracy, examples of democratic decision-making in the expenditure of funds, we should look at the trade union movement. I suggest that the hon. member for York North hang his head in shame if he suggests that the corporate sector is any kind of example of deciding how political funds are going to be expended.

It was in 1974 when we had a minority government that, because of the pressure from the New Democratic Party, we had a requirement for the first time that all donations over \$100 be publicly disclosed. Prior to that time corporations were making massive donations to both the Liberal party and the Conservative party with absolutely no accountability to absolutely anybody. Their shareholders did not even know about those donations. For my friend to suggest that somehow the shareholders can object is, frankly, not at all feasible.

It goes beyond that. Many of these corporations which give donations to the Liberal party and Conservative party are extracting a tax from consumers and working people. The money which they take in assessing a price for their product or service, part of that amount is being used to support a political party. Therefore, in respect of the Royal Bank or some of the other corporations which so heavily support the Liberals and Conservatives, many people are not aware of the fact that they are in a sense contributing indirectly to a political party.

I have a list here from the most recent returns before the chief electoral officer of some of the contributions which have been made to both the Liberal party and the Conservative party. I think these belong on the record of this debate. To start with, these are to the Liberal party, that great defender of working people: the Alberta Gas Trunk Pipeline, \$15,800.