

Supply—Labour

Mr. Harding: I now wish to say a few words about compulsory arbitration. I come from a province where in the spring of this year, 1968, we passed a bill known as bill 33 which brought a measure of compulsory arbitration for the first time to British Columbia. I am very much opposed to this concept. Our party is opposed to it. We fought the legislation through its various stages. The Social Credit government of the province felt this type of legislation was needed on the statute books of the province, and the legislation was enacted.

Nothing has been done under this legislation. That is, nothing so far has been given to the mediation board. In short, they have not tried the legislation out to see if it will work. Yet the method by which this compulsory arbitration board has been set up will make collective bargaining a farce. Here you have a board. The government knows, the labour groups know and the employers know that if negotiations do not go properly the dispute can go to the board. And what will happen? Employers and labour will stop trying to settle their differences collectively around a table. That is not what we want. We need not be ashamed of the collective bargaining record of unions and employers in Canada. If one looks at the record, and with few exceptions the record is quite good, he will see that 30, 40 or 50 times more man-days in this country are lost through unemployment than through strikes. For every man-day lost through strikes in this country there are 20 or 30 man-days lost through sickness.

If the government wants to save man-days that are lost to employment it ought to curtail unemployment, which is currently running at 5 per cent of our Canadian labour force. That is far higher than is good for a healthy economy. That is what we are advocating—get rid of unemployment, or curtail it as much as possible.

Labour and management need not be ashamed of their bargaining record. You know, it amazes me to hear politicians say that the labouring man should not have the right to sell his labour. That is the only thing he has to sell, and he has the right to go to the market and demand as high a price as he can obtain for it. Tonight I was watching a medical man talking on television. He was talking about higher fees and saying that no one should interfere with the raising of doctors' fees. Those who are in the legal profession, or in any other professional group, no doubt make the same plea. Yet, once you

[Mr. Lewis.]

begin with compulsory arbitration to set wage rates for the ordinary workmen, where will you stop? Will you go right down the line and take in the professional groups? If you are to be fair that is what you must do. How far down the line will you go, and where does the process stop? I suggest the collective bargaining system we have today is good enough and ought to be retained without change.

I wish to point out to the minister one of the big weaknesses in some of our labour legislation and some of the collective bargaining procedures we have today. This government, and provincial governments in Canada, have not provided a strong enough mediation service—and the minister pointed this out the other day. That is abundantly clear. No matter where you go in this country you will find that one of the keys to successful labour management relations is mediation. We must enter this field with experts and trained personnel, and dig out the facts.

We must also ask labour and management, when they sit around the table, to put all their cards on the table. Far too often we find that in disputes one side will refuse to divulge information. I suggest to the minister that it is in this area we ought to tighten up; we ought to tighten the regulations in the field of mediation services. If we do we shall have untold dividends in terms of industrial peace in Canada. I cannot urge this course to the minister too strongly. In all sincerity I say to the house, do not be misled by a few people who think compulsory arbitration will solve the ills of the management and labour in Canada. It will not. It will have an adverse effect and cause far more trouble than it will ever cure.

I will not take up more of the committee's time. There are other matters I wished to raise, and I hope to have the opportunity on some other day to bring them to the attention of the house.

Item agreed to.

Labour Relations—

5. Administration including the promotion of labour-management consultation, \$1,233,200.

Item agreed to.

● (9:50 p.m.)

Labour Standards and Benefits—

10. Administration, including the Government's contribution to Annuities Agents Pension Account in accordance with regulations made pursuant to Vote 181, Appropriation Act No. 5, 1961 and \$10,000 for grants for special research studies, \$3,012,700.