

Business of the House

States four years ago introduced a national minimum wage bill into the United States senate, and his comments underlined the humanitarian purpose of such a measure. Senator Kennedy said:

I have shown the need for this bill in facts and figures. But that is not its only justification. When we permit the growth of a depressed class, numbering millions, whose members cannot afford the bare necessities of life, we pay a heavy price. We undermine the general prosperity of the nation which rests upon consumer purchasing power. We promote the spread of slums, of crime, of disease, of all the ills which grow from hopeless poverty.

I certainly share that humanitarian purpose. We have heard from hon. gentlemen opposite the traditional argument against efforts to raise the levels of remuneration through minimum wages and through collective bargaining. The argument is that any increase in wages is bound to affect employment prospects in the industry concerned. I thought that argument had become obsolete. Apparently it has not, but it is certainly not supported by any investigation which has ever been undertaken to find out the effects of increasing wage levels.

Another argument advanced this afternoon was that the bill would have no substantial benefits—that its enactment would have negligible effects. That is not true. I have hundreds of federal employees in my constituency and there are hundreds in other areas of Canada who would be immediately affected by the enactment of a bill increasing the minimum wage to \$1.25. There are park employees working under the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources who are at present receiving rates of wages considerably lower than the minimum provided for in this bill.

Mr. Muir (Lisgar): How long have they been there?

Mr. MacEachen: I do not intend to undertake any historical survey.

An hon. Member: Your government was in power.

Mr. MacEachen: So that is why things should not be changed? Well, we have really heard an expression of Toryism this afternoon. Stick with the status quo—change nothing. We on this side believe in change and reform. That is why we are supporting this bill.

What is the alternative to providing a national minimum wage? The alternative is to allow workers in this country to live on the fringe of society and in certain cases chained to unproductive occupations. If we take action to increase the national minimum wage we shall be providing an incentive for

the development of more productive occupations of a kind which will provide them with a decent wage and a decent standard of living.

Mr. Terry Nugent (Edmonton-Strathcona): Mr. Speaker, the bill before us today is substantially the same as the one debated last year and I still find myself talking about one particular point which in my opinion the draftsman of this measure did not take into account. I refer to the hon. member's desire to fix a minimum wage right across the country without regard to the factors which vary from one region to another.

Some hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Argue: Shame.

Mr. Speaker: If hon. members have anything to say, to get on record in *Hansard*, they might, perhaps, seek the permission of the Chair and get the floor, rather than make these extraneous comments from their places.

Mr. Argue: I wonder, then, if I might ask the hon. member whether he will conclude his remarks in time for a vote to be taken.

Mr. Nugent: When I have found something wrong in a bill, I do not think the hon. member would expect that with only one minute left I could educate such hon. members as himself with regard to the matter.

I was pointing out the fallacy behind the bill. It would set a minimum wage across the country without any regard to the varying conditions in different parts of Canada which cause wages to be lower in some places and higher in others. This point was touched on by some of the speakers who have referred to the present provincial legislation. I am sure anyone who has travelled across Canada has found a great difference in prevailing rates.

Some hon. Members: Six o'clock.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Chevrier: Would the leader of the house kindly tell us the business for Monday and the course of next week?

Mr. Churchill: As I suggested this morning in answer to a question by the hon. member, the intention is to move into committee of ways and means on Monday, and we might continue in committee of ways and means during the course of the week if the house wishes to continue the debate.

Mr. Chevrier: In view of the special circumstances prevailing this session, will not the government give consideration to having the Minister of Finance take advantage of the provisions of standing order 58 to make his