

Industrial Relations

I find that six provinces already have legislation similar to that proposed here. They are Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia. British Columbia and Saskatchewan have the best laws. Modesty prevents me from saying which is the absolute best, but Saskatchewan is not so very far behind.

I find that only 400,000 of Canada's total working force of more than 5 million could be affected in any way, even theoretically, by the bill proposed by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre. I also find that of the 400,000 workers who could be theoretically affected by the bill, 93 per cent of them are, by and large, already covered fairly satisfactorily one way or another by arrangements which they have worked out themselves, either as the result of collective bargaining or through the ordinary business processes involved in the relationship between employer and employee.

The matter boils down to this, that only about 7 per cent of the workers who could theoretically be covered by federal legislation might get some real and immediate benefit under Bill No. 211, advanced by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre. Therefore it seems to me that we have to ask ourselves what is the advantage of passing such a law if only a minority can be effected in any event and only a small fraction of that minority are already outside the limits of the benefits proposed in the bill.

After careful reflection I have come down on the side of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre with respect to this matter, because it does seem to me that the parliament of the Dominion of Canada has a moral obligation to set a good pace in all measures for human betterment, and I certainly do not think that in any matter involving wages, working conditions or that sort of thing it should ever be left to the national government of Canada to fall behind any of the provinces, even the most progressive provinces of Canada such as we have in the far west.

Therefore I have decided to lend whatever support I can to the passage of the bill. While I have no doubt that if the bill gets to the industrial relations committee we will be able to improve some of its details, by and large I think it is a good bill worthy of support, and I commend it to the consideration of the house.

Mr. Knowles: May I ask a question?

Mr. Philpott: Before we come to the hon. member's question, let me state something quite openly and in so doing continue the

bad habit I started in the first part of my speech two or three weeks ago when, as I said, I was thinking out loud. There is one real objection in my mind, and that is the one I mentioned the last time although I did not pick a very good illustration of it because I referred to the floor price on butter. I suggested offhand that the floor price on butter tends to become the ceiling price on butter, and some of my city friends have pointed out that is not necessarily so, that in Canada the commercial price of butter is often quite a lot higher than the floor price, as we all know.

But I do believe the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre and all of us should think about this aspect of the problem, too. Is it a fact that if you enact a law establishing a floor under working conditions, that floor tends to become the ceiling? I know that in the old days the old fashioned trade union leader very familiar to my good friend the hon. member for Cape Breton South (Mr. Gillis), never wanted the government to do anything for him except to keep their hands off his business and let him run his show in his own way. The old fashioned trade union leader always considered that a minimum wage became the maximum wage, and therefore in the earlier years it was their tendency by and large to oppose all such things as minimum wages and provisions of a similar type. But I have noticed in later years, as the organized trade movement in Canada has got bigger, stronger and broader—maybe it is better, though I do not know; I do not think it is better in all ways but certainly it has become more powerful—it has swung around more and more to the idea of legislative action when legislative action might tend to assist general working conditions.

The final thing which has influenced my judgment that the bill deserves support and that we should send it to the industrial relations committee to see if we cannot improve some of the details is that it seems to me that all laws having to do with working conditions and labour are tending to reduce disagreements over those things that some call the fringes, those things on the fringes that tend to cause disputes or that sometimes lead to injustices even if it is to a small minority of the workers.

I am not one of those who believe it is better to leave all these things to collective bargaining or fringe benefits which may be offset against increases in pay and working hours. It seems to me it is much better, where legislation fits the case, to make as fair a basis as you can for the general problem you have to meet, and leave the ordinary