

Canada Labour Code

Through its traditional nurturing of good industrial relations—and it is paramount if there is going to be co-operation that there be good relations between the two groups and this is essential to good industrial relations—the federal government has always been at pains to ensure that the legislation which is enforced is, as far as humanly possible, legislation that is best suited to, and most acceptable by, the prevailing circumstances and conditions.

In the case of part V of the Canada Labour Code, a part of the code which has had, over the years, an immense amount of attention focused on it, its various requirements and provisions are well tested and well proven.

As I have indicated, the code is in many ways a culmination of the input of many different people, people with a direct knowledge of and concern for the industrial relations environment. This input has been commensurate with the tradition in Canada of promoting the common well-being referred to in the preamble—by encouraging free collective bargaining and the constructive settlement of labour-management disputes. This, I think, is the essence of the labour code, to see to it that these two groups can attempt to reach the end which they see they need and must have in order to function, but to do so with compassion and, surely, the understanding we need in this very fast changing world today.

Having said that, I would respectfully make the point that it would be folly indeed to introduce any amendment to the provisions of the act that has not been vociferously and specifically requested by one or preferably both of the parties directly concerned.

To my knowledge, neither labour nor management side has made any sort of a concerted call for the proposed amendment that is now before the House, introduced by the hon. member for York North. And I think it is true to say that the government has no desire whatever to set what may well be a dangerous precedent by agreeing to an amendment which does not have widespread support, to say the least.

The point should also be strongly made that when it adopted part V of the Canada Labour Code, Parliament was in effect reaffirming the principle of actively encouraging unions to be masters of their own affairs—and indeed to operate with an absolute minimum of government involvement and interference. I am sure the hon. member for York North would agree with that concept because he is an advocate of more *laissez-faire* rather than more government involvement in whatever the issue may be. This has been, and remains, the Canadian way, and I for one heartily encourage it.

It was because of this strongly held principle that Parliament decided not to enact the twin Woods task force recommendations of automatically granting unions the agency shop or compulsory check-off to which my colleague alluded, and legislating procedures to guarantee the freedom of dissenting members to opt out of plans that channel union funds to political parties.

As you know, the Liberal party is not funded by the unions. I would say, on the other hand, that although some funds are

brought in by bigger businesses throughout Canada it is, by and large, the rank and file, the ordinary Canadian who has chosen to donate moneys for our campaigns and to our party.

It is also interesting and relevant to note that Parliament's approach on the issue of regulation of union contributions to political causes also indicated that this had not been a source of problems. In addition to this, Parliament's approach paralleled the provincial practice of non-regulation.

Some may ask what provinces have legislation with regard to the specific use of moneys from union dues going to support political parties. I would point out that both Prince Edward Island and British Columbia, in the 1960s, did possess legislative provisions controlling the use of union funds for political purposes. They removed these provisions in the early 1970s. That, to my mind, say a lot, and adds further support to the federal government's stand.

I venture to suggest that another and equally compelling reason for opposing Bill C-203 is that it can very easily be viewed as being against the best interests of the union movement. Let it be known that this party is not opposed to unions. We are in favour of unions, and of unions organizing so that they can get the best possible deal for their membership.

As I have already indicated, there are no problems my department knows of that stem from the practice of unions contributing to political parties. I think this is another important point, and should be underlined. Over all, I think Canadians can take some satisfaction in knowing that federal labour legislation is generally viable, responsive, and effective.

I am by no means implying that the legislation as it presently stands is perfect—no legislation is—far from it. It can always be improved. Indeed the Department of Labour is continually reviewing and comparing the Canada Labour Code with its many counterparts in the provincial jurisdictions, as well as with legislation in force in other countries. To this end I will be attending the International Labour Organization Conference next week in Geneva, with my colleague, the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie (Mr. Irwin). At that time we will have a chance to compare our legislation and ideas with other countries. This will give us a better idea of where our government and ideas fit into the over-all scene as it is looked at by those countries.

The government is only too willing to give due consideration to any well-founded suggestion that might materially improve the operation of industrial relations in this country. Indeed, much of the legislation contained within our Canada Labour Code does, as I have indicated, reflect a high degree of input from the various players in the field of labour affairs. However, in my opinion, by no judgment can this bill presently before us be considered as offering any improvement whatever in the existing legislative framework.

For the reasons I have mentioned, I urge my colleagues in this House today to oppose the passage of this bill, and I trust that they will give due consideration to the points I have put before them.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!