

Supply—Labour

The lowest tender got the contract at the fair wages prevailing in the area. At the moment, I do not know the size of the area on which the fair wages are based. I do not know the strength of the organizations on either side, who are concerned in this matter. We set up the fair wages in that particular industry, and that is what must be paid. When those wages are paid, the lowest tender gets the contract. What would my hon. friend say if the contracts were let to other than the lowest tender?

Mr. MacInnis: Mr. Chairman, the minister said that there was a fair-wage clause in the contract. I understand that there is a fair wage clause in every federal contract, but that does not mean that fair wages are paid for work done under that contract, unless someone sees to it that they are. Putting a fair-wage clause in the contract is one thing; that is merely a formality. Someone should make certain that the fair wages are paid. The fair wages in the locality—they are not necessarily the union wages—have to be determined. They should be determined, so that those people who are interested in that kind of labour in Winnipeg can get the information quite easily. They should be able to ascertain whether or not that fair wage is being paid on that particular work.

So far as I know, the Minister of Labour has not stated that the fair wage is being paid. He merely said that the fair-wage clause is in the contract, and that the government is going as far as it need go. Perhaps it is the responsibility of the people living in the community to see that the fair wage is paid.

Mr. Mitchell: I have an organization in Winnipeg in charge of a conciliation officer. There cannot be any secrets about these things. All the people who are interested have to do is to see this officer, Mr. R. H. Hooper, the conciliation officer, and he will tell them. There cannot be any secrets about this sort of thing.

Mr. Knowles: The minister has tried to make out that those of us who are interested in this matter have been vague, and have not stated in the proper way the information we require. I would remind him that the president of the Winnipeg district trades and labour council wrote him a full-page letter setting out the facts on October 24. Then, I wrote him a full-page letter on October 26 endorsing what had been said in Mr. Murphy's letter. Apparently the minister did not get in touch with the people in his department who might have given the information. He did nothing, and now he tells me I did not ask him in the right way.

As to his question to me, would I want the government to award the contract to a firm that had not submitted the lowest tender, Mr. Chairman, if the firm offering the lowest tender is a sweatshop, I would rather the government take the higher tender and make sure that good wages are being paid.

Mr. Mitchell: Don't let that get abroad. I do not think there would be any government in this country that would consciously, irrespective of its political complexion, permit sweatshop conditions to prevail under its fair-wage policy. I mean, that is all very well for the boys back home, but you cannot get away with it here.

Mr. Knowles: It's the boys back home who are complaining.

Mr. Mitchell: If my hon. friend had been clear, or had said to me in the lobby that this is the information he wanted, he could have gotten it.

Mr. Knowles: It was set out clearly in the letter I wrote.

Item agreed to.

795. International Labour conferences—further amount required, \$15,000.

Mr. Murray (Cariboo): Regarding the international labour situation, and the international labour office, I think that this house could very well consider whether the people of Canada are not establishing a standard of living which is probably the highest in the world; wage scales which are of the very highest; an eight-hour day; insurance plans of all kinds; relief projects for farmers and others; family allowances, and about everything that human ingenuity can devise to make security for the people. Yet, we have not got security. It occurs to me that, through this international labour office, we could quite well investigate the labour conditions in some of the countries which are our neighbours.

Coming as I do from the Pacific coast, I might say that we are especially interested in all those countries on the Pacific, such as Japan and China. The other day the Prime Minister of India was a guest in this chamber. Half the population of the world exists in that Pacific area, yet those countries have not an eight-hour day; they have not any minimum wage, nor any workmen's compensation. They have not any mothers' allowances, nor family allowances. Most of the people across the Pacific have the lowest standard of living the world has ever seen. I ask the Minister of Labour whether Canada is not proceeding rapidly to establish such