

*Canada Labour Code*

Rights Commission automatically investigating charges of sexual harassment, and when there is an organized workforce, we would like to see the union involved being granted the right to represent workers in those hearings. We believe that sexual harassment is a growing problem, a problem which is being recognized more in the workforce each year. The proposals under the Canada Labour Code are completely inadequate in terms of dealing with it.

There are other areas of weakness in the legislation. One proposal would allow the Minister to exclude from the legislation workers in various areas of the atomic energy field. We recognize that in certain areas it may be of benefit to workers in that they may come under stronger provincial legislation. If that is the case, we can accept the purpose of the amendment. However, knowing the history of the Government and of the Atomic Energy Control Board, I would worry that some workers in the industry will be kept out of the Canada Labour Code, not because of better provincial legislation but because it is inconvenient for AECL, the mining company, or whatever agency is the employer, to grant adequate protection to workers.

I should like to cite some evidence of my concern. Just a few months ago the Atomic Energy Control Board held hearings which resulted in increasing by five times the amount of radiation to which women workers would be exposed. It increased a number of other levels affecting workers as well. We had to fight to make those meetings open to the press, even on an occasional basis. I rose in the House three times to ask the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Chrétien) to intervene in order to open the hearings of the Atomic Energy Control Board, even for the presentation of labour briefs. The board was reluctant but finally the hearings were opened on a limited basis. This control agency, the Atomic Energy Control Board, was rather reluctant to hold public hearings on matters of safety.

How can we allow the Minister the right to exclude workers in the atomic energy field, especially with these recent precedents before us? If he wants an exclusion of workers coming under provincial legislation because that legislation might be stronger, that makes sense. However, if he wants a blanket right to exclude workers in that field, it is unacceptable to us.

We are very worried about the Minister being allowed to exempt employers from the requirements of health and safety committees if he feels that the workplace is safe. As much as I have some respect for the Minister of Labour, I do not believe he knows which workplace in Canada is safe and which is unsafe. One of the purposes of setting up those committees is to guarantee that the workers and managers get together to look at potentially dangerous sites. For the Minister, presumably on the basis of some lobbying by management, to say that a particular industry is a safe one and does not require a joint committee is a dangerous exception. We will certainly oppose it at committee stage.

Similarly we are upset that the Minister talked about excluding ships from workplace safety committees. I think we all would agree that working on board ships can be just as

dangerous as working on land. Those committees should exist on ships, and I do not think the Minister has the right to say that ships will not be included as far as workplace safety committees are concerned.

In the area of technological change, we see a very minor amendment. The amendment proposed by the Minister indicates that where there is a significant number of employees, the required notice period shall increase from 90 days to 120 days. The definition of "significant number" is left to the Labour Relations Board. That is not good enough. Employees right across the country should know what types of units will be used to determine whether or not this amendment is in effect.

● (1220)

We are concerned that the definition of technological change is very narrow. It might be possible for many companies to claim that technological change is not really taking place and, therefore, they do not come under the purview of this legislation. We are concerned that by laying off workers in small numbers over a period of time, employers will not have to be concerned about the proposed amendment. In the past when certain employee groups tried to negotiate technological change amendments, they have been unsuccessful. Many employers have resisted it. With that in mind, it is important that there be much stronger amendments to the legislation.

In closing, there are changes that must be made but the legislation is important. We want to hear from representatives of both the workers and the employers. We want to see this legislation acted upon before we adjourn. I reiterate the offer made by our House Leader, the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain, that New Democrats will agree to pass this Bill on second reading in one day. We will meet morning, noon and night to hear representatives of workers and employers to study this legislation.

We will be introducing amendments as we go through the committee process, but we would like the other Parties in this House to guarantee that this legislation and any amendments to it will be disposed of prior to the June recess. Without that, more lives will be lost, more people will suffer injury, more children will be born with abnormalities. The House of Commons will have failed those people and their unborn children. We will have not met the concerns of people who have a right to expect us to act for their safety and, indeed, their very lives.

**Mr. Maurice Foster (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Treasury Board):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to say a few words on the Canada Labour Code amendments, Bill C-34. I am particularly encouraged by the amount of agreement there seems to be in the House to deal with this Bill before the end of the current session. We have been waiting for this Bill for a year or two. We are delighted to see it on the table, to see the number of amendments that it makes and to see the encouraging sign that the Opposition, although not totally satisfied, seem to want to move the Bill to committee for more detailed study. Hopefully we will see it pass before the end of the current session at the end of June.