

Canada Labour Code

Another health problem which is gaining a lot of attention these days in the occupational health field is that of deafness. It is one of the fastest rising illnesses in this country. It is high time for a centre such as the Canadian centre for occupational health and safety to take strong initiatives and bring about a lowering of the noise levels in our factories and urge the various provincial workmen's compensation boards to deal more quickly with cases of deafness.

In conclusion, this bill is a great step in providing a better work environment and, therefore, better worker-management relations in our country. I look forward to making further remarks when the bill is studied in committee.

● (1642)

Mr. F. Oberle (Prince George-Peace River): Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of the industrial revolution, industry, government and business have been preoccupied with attempts to decide how the product of the industrial machine which we have built should be distributed. In this day and age we seem more concerned at every level—industry, labour and government—with the distribution of the benefits of the industrial machine than we are with oiling the machine and seeing that it keeps running. The risk of a breakdown in the industrial relations process has reached such proportions that some say it poses, at least in this country, a threat to the very survival of the economic system.

In the short time available to me I shall not, of course, be able to go back in history and draw from the experience of history in dealing with the measure we are discussing today. It is, however, my intention to place on record my views with regard to the current situation and to give an outline of the measures which Canadians workers and employers has a right to expect would be included in this bill after the promises made by the Minister of Labour (Mr. Munro) to approach the subject broadly and to make some fundamental changes to a system which has obviously run up on the rocks and is not functioning well at all.

First, let me put this whole subject of industrial relations into proper perspective in the Canadian context. When we speak about industrial relations, we are really speaking only about one-third of the Canadian work force; we are only speaking about one-third of industry which employs that work force. Those of us who represent constituencies in the House of Commons should pay more attention to the other two-thirds of the work force which has no access to unions, and to the two-thirds of the business community which employs those people and cannot afford the schemes of extravagance which have been generated by the industrial relations process. I have in mind small and medium-sized businesses for the most part.

An assessment reveals that the larger corporations, namely, those which maintain oligopolistic or monopolistic positions in society, are the ones which employ union workers. These are the corporations which manage to insulate themselves, if not completely isolate themselves, from the three market forces which the other two-thirds of the industrial community has to work with. Government, of course, is a perfect example. Public

[Mr. Haidasz.]

employees enjoy the greatest security, and their pensions are indexed, the reason being, of course, that government does not need to subject itself to the pressures of a free market system, but dips into the barrel every time a demand is made and settles that demand in a fashion which is least harmful to its political masters and to the harmonious operation of Crown agencies and the administration generally.

The bill has, it is true, recognized the need for adequate coverage of available unions across the country. One would have expected the Minister of Labour to address himself to this aspect. One would also expect him to have made an attempt in this bill to establish a labour code which would help those who are not presently organized either to become organized or to achieve an equitable share of that part of the gross national product which is labour's portion. On the other hand, we would have the right to expect the minister to address himself to the serious problems faced by the business community which is subjected to free market forces and which has a very difficult time dealing with workers when they demand concessions equal to or similar to those which the government grants its own employees.

One of the aspects of the bill which is particularly offensive to me is that discretion to impose a first-year settlement, in cases where certification has been achieved, should be left to the minister or his officials. To put this in proper context, one must consider the certification process, a process which is still not adequately protected in a democratic manner. As a matter of fact, the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, in a statement to the minister expressing disappointment with his approach to this question, expresses the view that "certification of a union as a bargaining agent should only occur where there is evidence that there is majority support for a union through a government supervised secret ballot."

I was involved in a situation recently in which unions were certified to represent the work force of a certain industry although the majority of the employees were not in favour of certification. Should the two parties not be able to get together after certification has been made by the government, the minister takes it upon himself to impose a first-year settlement. I can only assume that his decision would be in accordance with the general guidelines and standards set by the public sector.

A great many employers express fears of the consequences such a procedure might bring. As a matter of fact, I am connected with a firm which finds itself exactly in that position. Certification has been made, but there is no contract because the workers do not want a contract. The union which has been certified will not tune or change its contract, a global contract signed in British Columbia. The upshot is this: the employees of that company have no access to a union simply because they are not prepared to sign a contract imposed on them by a union even though it has been properly certified. I serve notice on the minister that these workers will be equally upset if he comes along and tells them he intends to impose the initial contract.