

Canada Labour (Standards) Code

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I suggest to the hon. member that a supplementary question might be asked tomorrow. I bring to his attention that a number of hon. members did not have an opportunity to ask their questions. Perhaps the hon. member might be given priority tomorrow to raise this matter by way of an original question.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

CANADA LABOUR (STANDARDS) CODE

AMENDMENTS RESPECTING HOURS OF WORK, WAGES, VACATIONS, TERMINATION OF EMPLOYMENT, ETC.

The House resumed, from Tuesday, April 27, consideration of the motion of Mr. Mackasey that Bill C-228, to amend the Canada Labour (Standards) Code be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Is it understood that the minister's being called now will close the debate? I believe there was discussion in the House yesterday with regard to this matter. If there is no further discussion on the point, and the minister speaks now, he will close the debate. Is this agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Hon. Bryce Mackasey (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, my first words are to thank the members of the opposition for permitting me to close the debate at this time in order that we may go on to other legislation before six o'clock.

As is customary with legislation dealing with labour, Mr. Speaker, the debate has been marked by very constructive criticism of changes and additions to the Labour (Standards) Code as well as suggestions on how the bill could be improved at the committee stage. It has been noted by most speakers that while the bill does not amend or change to any great extent the standards that are incorporated in the present legislation, nevertheless in many areas the proposed changes are breaking new ground in this country.

I might recall for members who have not been present during the debate of the last couple of days that for the first time in the federal field we will be providing for severance pay, group termination, individual notice, maternity leave, equal pay for similar work and protection for workers against loss of employment as a result of garnishment of their wages. The differences of opinion, which were valid, of course, did not centre on whether we should include those features in the legislation which the House is being asked to adopt in principle but whether the changes proposed go far enough.

There has been criticism of the whole approach of the government to labour and I am not certain that these criticisms were expressed at the proper time on second reading. I might remind the House once again that a

[Mr. Crouse.]

companion piece of legislation will be introduced later in the session which will deal with industrial relations; that is, it will deal exclusively with what we tend to call the organized sector of labour.

As I mentioned earlier in the debate, I think we all too frequently forget that approximately 60 per cent of the work force in Canada, and certainly more than 50 per cent in the federal field, is made up of workers who for the most part depend upon the standards and minimums—I emphasize the word "minimums"—that are introduced and passed in this House, rather than upon trade unions, craft unions or any other form of protection at the bargaining table.

In other words, the minimum wage, hours of work, conditions for drawing overtime and all the new provisions that I mentioned are now available to people in the unorganized sector of the economy as a result of legislation and not as a result of collective bargaining. Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, I must emphasize that the standards we are introducing and the standards we are amending, particularly in the minimum wage area, are meant to be precisely that—standards and minimums. It is not the intent as a general principle to run ahead of collective bargaining because that would be very unfair to the employer and to some degree unfair to those employees who do have the right to bargain collectively for conditions of employment.

There was some talk yesterday, Mr. Speaker, of the effect the minimum wage could have on our export position, but I have been unable to trace any such effect. As a matter of fact, in preparing this bill and in preparing myself for debate on various occasions, not only in this House but elsewhere, and considering the effect the minimum wage would have on the economy through the work force and its possible effect on employers and industry, I have been surprised, and disenchanted to some degree, at the lack of material available on the effect not only of the minimum wage but of termination, individual notice, and so forth.

There has been mention of the textile industry. Speaking for myself and not necessarily the government, I agree with the concept raised by some members of the House that labour should not resist technological change. I have always been an advocate of the concept that for our industries to remain competitive in the export field, labour and management must accept technological change, innovation and new methods of automation. While these may have the short-term effect of reducing a particular work force, in my opinion the end result is a more competitive industry. The studies which I have read, which are available in any library, indicate that our real competition in the textile industry—Japan and Korea—stems not primarily and exclusively from inexpensive labour in those countries but, rather, because these countries have taken advantage of the latest technology.

Having said that, and recognized that labour is on shaky ground in rejecting technological change, I think employers are also on shaky ground when asking labour to accept technological change for the good of the coun-