

Mr. JOHNSTONE: We have never used averaging on federal contracts, and I cannot see that we are using it under the amending act.

Senator GROSART: Has it ever been used by regulation?

Mr. JOHNSTONE: No.

Senator GROSART: Have there ever been any other exceptions under the regulations, under special permits, under the extension of hours in the north, and so on? Are there any other areas of extension laid down in the provisions of this act?

Hon. Mr. NICHOLSON: You mean for wages?

Senator GROSART: Wages or hours, or anything else.

Hon. Mr. NICHOLSON: We never had a federal minimum until Parliament passed the Labour (Standards) Act last year. This is complementary legislation to that act, which brought in the minimum wage last year.

Senator GROSART: But this act has been in force since 1965.

Hon. Mr. NICHOLSON: The minimum wage only came in last year.

The CHAIRMAN: Senator Flynn.

Senator FLYNN: Mr. Chairman, I was wondering if the minister would agree with my perspective of the bill which deals with fair wages and hours of labour. It is only to establish some of the conditions of the construction contracts awarded by the federal Government. May I suggest that if this act did not exist the Government could, by order in council, establish the conditions under which any federal construction contract could be awarded. In other words, the Government tells any contractor that if he wants to bid or to be awarded by the Government he will have to pay certain wages and observe certain hours of work, and other conditions which are standard in forms of contract but not embodied in any legislation, but which bind the contractors just the same. By these amendments the Government is saying only that you will observe the wages and hours of work established by the Labour Code adopted last year.

Hon. Mr. NICHOLSON: Yes, the Government would have to be bound by the legislation that has been in existence since 1935. If you will look at clause 1 of the bill you will see that it reads:

“fair wages” means such wages as are generally accepted as current for competent workmen in the district in which the work is being performed for the character or class of work in which such workmen are respectively engaged;

Subject to that, you are quite right, the Government could do it, but the Government would be in this very anomalous position that we have directed that railways, airlines, banks, or any other body that comes within the federal Government regulations must comply with this, and it would be rather inconsistent if we did not have it in our own legislation.

Senator FLYNN: But this act applies only to contracts awarded by the Government.

Hon. Mr. NICHOLSON: You are quite correct. Mr. Chairman, I started out by asking one of the officials to assist in a question put by Senator Rattenbury. I would like to support what the deputy minister said. As the senator pointed out, the collective agreement hours, if you want to put it that way, in the construction industry vary I believe from 37½ to 60 hours, and in a few institutions as much as 60 hours at straight line rates of pay. I think it would be turning the clock back, and I say this advisedly, with respect, if we were to substitute proposals such as the senator suggested, instead of a national standard of hours. If we want to have a national standard of hours—and we have had it for 31 years—I think it is public policy to continue to follow that policy.