

As a last word I wish to tell the Minister of Labour that in my opinion he has the greatest opportunity that any Minister of Labour in Canada ever had, if he will only grasp that opportunity with courage and firmness he has an opportunity to do something in Canada that possibly could never have been done before, but can be done now.

He has the background of the labour movement; he knows the labour movement of the old country as he knows the labour movement of this country and I should like to see him go forward. I can assure him of this, if he does not already know it, that in anything he does to improve the relationship between workers and employers, I will assist him in every way possible. I will do everything that is within my power, and I will refuse to do anything for political or any other purposes, to impede him in any way. Two years ago a man prominent in the trade union movement told me that he had been asked to accept the position of Minister of Labour. He said, "I could not take that position, because what was expected of me I could not do; that was, that I should be the apologist for the government labour policies to the organized labour movement." I suggest to the Minister of Labour that he do not undertake that job. If he does the opposite; if he comes out boldly and squarely for progressive labour industrial relations, he will have the labour movement of this country with him to the last man.

Mr. MITCHELL: There are one or two points I think I should answer though I want it understood that I am not going to be controversial. The hon. member for Vancouver East just made a reference to my assuming the position of Minister of Labour. I want to be perfectly frank and honest with him in saying that since this war broke out, anything I have been asked to do that I thought was in the national interest, I have done; and I think he will agree that at times I have accepted some pretty tough assignments. I trust I may make that contribution which the hon. member says he hopes I will make. I do not expect to satisfy everybody. My good friend Ernie Bevin in England has not satisfied everybody. He has had some very harsh things said about him by quite prominent members of the British House of Commons, across the floor of that chamber. The same things have been said about the Minister of Labour in New Zealand; the same things are said about Madam Perkins to the south of us. This is one of those very difficult portfolios, where very few lasting reputations are earned, despite the sincerity of the individual. But when this

[Mr. MacInnis.]

war is over I hope it may be said that at least I made some contribution to the state, and in some degree helped to defeat the man over there in Berlin whom we want to defeat. That is the only ambition I have at the moment.

The hon. member for Cape Breton South spoke of the freezing of wages. I say to him frankly that the order was never intended to be a wage-freezing order. It is a wage-stabilizing order. In taking that action I think we are in good company. Recently the President of the United States announced that possibly a similar policy would be brought into operation in that country; and also quite recently the labour Prime Minister of Australia put into force a somewhat similar policy. This tremendous undertaking had for its purpose the protection of the living standards of the people of this country, but there are bound to be mistakes in working out such a vast policy. The record shows, however, that compared with the same period during the last war the purchasing power of our dollar is 18 per cent greater than it was at that time. While my hon. friend was speaking I thought of the old age pensioners whom we were discussing this afternoon. I thought of those people with fixed incomes: soldiers, sailors, persons receiving workmen's compensation, those on mothers' allowances, and the protection they will receive if we can maintain the price stabilization policy that we have set in motion. That is all I am going to say about this point.

I was interested in the letter read by the hon. member for Vancouver East from my very good friend of many years standing, Sir Walter Citrine, general secretary of the British trade union congress, with respect to employees in government institutions. I am frank to admit that there is an anomaly there, as far as the dominion is concerned, and it is a matter which I intend to discuss with the Department of Justice after looking at the correspondence which was read this afternoon by my hon. friend.

Then the hon. member for Cape Breton South spoke about absenteeism and as he was speaking I had before me some figures which would indicate that absenteeism has been reduced tremendously in the last few months. The time lost per thousand workers in 1940 was 85 days; for the same period in 1941 it was 56 days, and it was also 56 days in 1942.

Mr. GILLIS: Has there not been a tremendous increase right across the country during the last month?

Mr. MITCHELL: I am not going to enter into a controversy.