

Canada Labour (Standards) Code

Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander) and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), all of whom have contributed to the bill through their efforts on the Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration.

It is significant that the differences of opinion that have been expressed today are simply ones of degree. The government, in its wisdom, suggests a minimum wage of \$1.75 and the opposition suggests \$2. The hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie (Mr. Murphy), who spoke very eloquently today, has been consistent in his efforts from within the government party to raise the minimum wage, and has provided useful and desirable pressure to review periodically the minimum wage in order that it be set at a desirable level. So that far from resenting his contribution today or even his vote, I welcome it as an indication that not only does the opposition exist to place pressure upon the minister to do what is necessary, but also that there are within the party itself members who are concerned about the legislation that affects the daily lives of the workers of Canada.

In his contribution the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre paid tribute to the bill, and I appreciate that. He mentioned three areas of the bill that he felt could stand amendment next year, areas that he suggested were reasonable ones for improvement, and I do not disagree with him that there are such areas. But they involve essentially differences in degree.

The first area is that of holidays. I did consider nine this year rather than eight. There is the question of the number of paid holidays—vacations with pay, if you like; and then there is the greater question of the minimum wage. However, upon reflection and with hindsight I think I did the right thing and that, since this is the first general revision of the Canada Labour (Standards) Code since it was brought in in 1965 by my predecessor, the present House leader, who had the vision to bring in the bill in the first place no doubt applauded by hon. members opposite, I should concentrate my efforts on breaking new ground in other areas of the bill that affect the people of Canada.

I am particularly pleased that we have made our provisions for equal pay for similar work a more practical piece of legislation. By putting them in the labour standards code the government, through my department, now has the initiative to seek out discrimination rather than to depend on complaints from people who, quite logically, have been terrified at bringing forward such complaints.

• (4:40 p.m.)

I think the maternity leave is something everybody appreciates. It is in the Code for the first time and it is a recognition of the fact that working women make up 35 per cent of the work force. It is also an appreciation of the fact that most women who work today do not work because they want a second television or a second automobile, but because their income quite often represents the difference between starvation and at least an existence. A mother who has to take time out to have a

[Mr. Mackasey.]

child will, as a result of this legislation and the Unemployment Insurance Act, be able to do so with a minimum of concern about where the next dollar is to come from to help maintain that home. Maternity leave is a definite step forward just as the group termination provision is a step forward.

I think we will have an opportunity during the debate on the other legislative measure to discuss this matter further. In this technological age, regardless of the rate of national unemployment in the future, even if we get it down to 2 per cent or 3 per cent, we will always be faced with the fact that people's lives are affected by automation and technological progress. As an old railroad worker, I remember when we felt we had a job for life after 10 years' seniority. Suddenly, we found that boilermakers and foundrymen were no longer required and people of 50 and 51 years of age found themselves out of work and on the street for the first time. We suddenly found that yardmen and firemen had become redundant.

These problems of progress are problems that all parties should recognize. This is why we include measures in the bill dealing with group termination notice, so that the Manpower and other departments can help ease the burden by minimizing the effects of change. Not the least important feature is the provision which makes it impossible for an employer to fire someone who has the misfortune of having his wages garnisheed. This was a practice that always upset me. At least in the federal field it is no longer possible for an employer to simply dismiss a person who has come on bad times, then having got back to work suddenly finds himself dismissed from the job because of an over-zealous creditor.

Let me say as the Minister of Labour that I am satisfied with this bill and I hope it will find satisfaction with all hon. members. Let me say, in one of these rare moments when I am not politically partisan, that it represents fair, sound and good policy. I hope it will be accepted on that basis by all parties.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): "Rare" is right.

Mr. Mackasey: I think the contributions of the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander), the hon. member for Moncton (Mr. Thomas) and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) should indicate to Canadians that our process works in spite of the fact it may be based on the adversary concept. Good legislation is possible in spite of that fact. When and if we are prepared to accept constructive criticism I do not think it is a sign of weakness. Nor do I think it is a sign of weakness when we accept amendments proposed by the opposition, particularly if they improve a bill and the opposition is performing its role. I do not resent this.

I do not think the opposition members resent my actions on those occasions when I must reject their amendments, because I have to look at things from all angles and because I am perhaps privy to more information. I have taken to heart the suggestion of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre that in the future we look at the question of annual adjustments to the minimum wage. Certainly, it is apparent that we should