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DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

(HANSARD) Published under the authority of The Honourable Dan D'Autremont Speaker

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Labour Legislation

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier should check his facts. We know the Leader of the Opposition has given a second reading speech on Bill 85 just shortly after being elected the leader. So check your facts.

But we know, Mr. Speaker, we know no one asked for Bill 85's massive overhaul of workplace and employment laws. And the reason no one asked for it is because the laws in place today are largely working, as the Minister of Labour acknowledged earlier today. They're productive; our workplaces are productive. We have general labour peace and co-operation between employers and working women and men. But following the limited feedback period with no public consultations, the Sask Party unveiled the draft of Bill 85 on the final days of the legislative session in December.

Mr. Speaker, I'm willing to work on a fair solution. My question to the minister is: will he use today, May Day, International Workers' Day, to commit to put Bill 85 on hold and work with me and stakeholders on a better set of labour laws that will benefit everyone?

The Speaker: I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: Mr. Speaker, we're not going to wait for May Day. The hon. member references the fact that there is labour peace in the province today. This notwithstanding the fact that every other labour legislation suggestion that had been brought forward by this side of the House has been met by that side of the House with predictions of the dire consequences, that the labour relations in the province would self-destruct if we brought in construction labour relations reform — they were wrong; that the labour relations of the province would sour if we simply brought in secret ballot certification — they were wrong. Mr. Speaker, we have labour peace. They predicted a disaster if we allowed for freedom of expression in the workplace for workers or for the employers. They were wrong, Mr. Speaker.

We have labour peace in Saskatchewan. And even more importantly, in terms of the

wealth of working people in the province, there are 25,700 more working people in Saskatchewan today, 50,600 since we took office; a 3.9 per cent unemployment rate, the lowest in the country; average weekly earnings up over \$700 a month, 24 per cent since our government took office, Mr. Speaker. That is the best measure of all in terms of the health of working families in this province.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan stand to lose protections in this bill that are very important to our way of life here that we enjoy in Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, there were 60, 60 lives lost in workplace deaths last year. And one is too many, and one is tragic. And the record number of deaths should point to a need to review the occupational health and safety laws. But, Mr. Speaker, that's not what Bill 85 will accomplish. As has been raised by so many people, Bill 85 does not address the serious concerns workers have about OH & S [occupational health and safety], about their own safety.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear that Bill 85 needs much more work, and how can the Sask Party plow ahead with passing Bill 85 when there's so much that is not understood about its implications on the workplace?

The Speaker: I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: Mr. Speaker, we take very seriously the issue of workplace safety in this province, and the minister responsible has laid out plans through the various mechanisms of government, the pieces of legislation, to seek those improvements, Mr. Speaker.

But the hon. member refers to changes that the Act will bring that are going to hurt workers. Doesn't get into any specifics. I kind of think I know what he's talking about because there's some misinformation going around the province today about what Bill 85 is and isn't. For example, Mr. Speaker, there is a concern that there'll be no more lunch breaks because, under this particular bill, a break can be refused in the case of an emergency, which is exactly the case today in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, members of the minister's advisory committee have asked for the definition to go back into the Act, and so amendments are going to take care of that particular issue, if that's what he's talking about.

With respect to hours of work, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the four days of 10-hour shifts, Mr. Speaker, hundreds of agreements have been in existence for years of four days, 10-hour shifts approved by permit by those members opposite when they were in government. In fact our information was that they never turned one down, Mr. Speaker. These kinds of shift organizations occur today in Alberta, in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario, and PEI [Prince Edward Island].

Mr. Speaker, this is not an excuse not to pay overtime, and amendments will be brought forward to clarify that as well, Mr. Speaker. If the member wants to work through systemically the concerns that he has or that others have, we can do that because we've

been listening and the clarifications are coming, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now one of the biggest flaws in the sweeping rewrite of the province's labour laws is how much is left out of law, left to regulation to be dictated by the government when it suits them.

Six months after the Sask Party government tabled its labour bill, they still haven't revealed what's in the regulations. And, Mr. Speaker, with so much left to be determined by regulation, it's clear the provisions in the bill just don't cut it. And that's exactly why this legislature should not be passing this bill. We do not know all the consequences that could result from those regulations.

Mr. Speaker, workplace safety and workplace rights are at stake. Will the Sask Party government do the right thing and delay the passage of Bill 85 until all of the work, including the consideration of its regulations, have been completed?

The Speaker: I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: Mr. Speaker, in all honesty we heard similar concerns presented by the NDP in advance of the passage of the construction labour relations legislation of this government. In advance of the labour amendments we made, we heard their predictions of peril and destruction if we were to pass those legislations, and the harm they would cause to the labour environment of the province. And now by their own admission, by the admission of the Leader of the Opposition and the critic, there is labour peace in the province of Saskatchewan.

We have a growing economy. We have more families working today. We have higher wages being paid to those families, Mr. Speaker. I would also say to the member this, that the measure of what's going to happen in regulations or in other parts of the bill might be found in actions we've taken at the behest of union leaders who asked that this province index minimum wage — we're doing it, Mr. Speaker; that we would provide unpaid leave to attend citizenship ceremonies — we're going to do it; unpaid leave to donate an organ — we're going to do it; standardization and reduction of qualifying periods for parental, maternity, and adoption leave — we're doing all those things, Mr. Speaker, not because business asked for them, but because labour did.