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DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

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Progress of Labour Bill

Mr. Forbes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, members of the Minister of Labour's own advisory committee have asked him to slow down on Bill 85. This morning the Regina Leader-Post printed a plea from a member of the minister's own hand-picked committee. Hugh Wagner, who sits on that committee, writes that the Sask Party is in a hurry for no reason. And I quote:

The new bill repeals nearly 1,000 pages of current provincial legislation and consolidates it into 184. In total, 33 pieces of legislation are repealed and/or amended — a substantial undertaking that, logically, should require far more public, labour and business input than what has been provided for to date.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister at least slow down his plan to ram this bill through and listen to the concerns of the very people he appointed to work on this legislation?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Advanced Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question, and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the advisory committee. These are people from business and within the labour movement. They provided a lot of advice, direction, and guidance.

The makeup of the committee is such that it is not likely going to produce a consensus on a lot of issues. But I'm surprised, Mr. Speaker, that there was a consensus on a number of things. Those things have found their way into the bill. Over the course of the last few months, we've received 3,800 submissions. We've had an additional period of time to allow for submissions once the bill has been introduced. We know that, as a result of that, we are going to have to make a series of changes and, Mr. Speaker, the process is going along. We have a number of other meetings going on and we will make changes as are required and as are appropriate.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, clearly the working people of Saskatchewan have been kept in the dark on this. And the more time people try to shine some light on the Sask Party's workplace law rewrite, the more they're uncovering strange inconsistencies.

For example, Mr. Speaker, the old law specified Sunday would be a day of rest whenever possible while scheduling. Now in fact, the new law doesn't, and this was not brought to the public's attention in December before Christmas. Obviously some are very concerned that this will unfairly upset the work-family balance people in Saskatchewan value as core to our way of life here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, this is clearly a consequence of a rushed piece of legislation. Will the minister do the right thing, listen to members of his own advisory committee, and delay the passage of this bill so that these kind of problems can be sorted out?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Advanced Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question again. The issue the member raises is whether Sunday should be enshrined as a specified day off. There have been court challenges with regard to Sunday being a religious holiday and the Act has been amended in compliance with the rulings of the courts in our province and elsewhere. We do require there to be two days a week, two days of rest per week, Mr. Speaker, rather than including Sunday, which is in compliance with the law of the land now.

Mr. Speaker, I can advise that the member from Saskatoon Riversdale asked the question on Monday, March 4th, and she read this section from the Act. She said, "In prescribed workplaces . . . an employer shall grant to employees in the workplace or to the category of employees two consecutive days off . . ." Then she goes on half a page later and says, "So am I correct in saying that employees will no longer be entitled to two days off in a week?" Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite and the member for Riversdale, if she reads her own question, there are two consecutive days off per week.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's an interesting answer that the minister clearly has thought about this but did not highlight this particular change in December. And while he may talk about it as a faith issue, many people talk about it as a work-life balance issue. And he's not had the time to highlight that kind of change with people who would like to know that that's the change we're kind of talking about. So I'll say it again, Mr. Speaker: this Sask Party government just will not listen.

We know over the last three months experts have pored over these changes to spot what's been left out and what will change for middle-class workers and small businesses. These experts say they need more time to track these changes and consider the potential consequences of the Sask Party labour bill. And it begs the question, as Hugh Wagner

asks in the paper today, and I quote: “What is driving the government’s rushed efforts to pass Bill 85 in the spring sitting of the legislature?”

To the minister: will he commit today to listen to members of his own advisory committee and delay passage of Bill 85 until the fall sitting?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Advanced Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: Mr. Speaker, our province is bound by the courts. It’s not a subject that we can debate, whether we have Sundays as a day off or another day off. The issue is we are providing that employees are entitled to two consecutive days off. We’ve done that. This isn’t something we would want to delay a bill or a piece of legislation for.

I am however pleased that the member opposite is reading the bill and is studying the bill. I went through the various submissions that have come in to date, Mr. Speaker. And since the bill has been introduced, one of the ones that I would have thought would have introduced or filed a submission would have been the members opposite. But to date, Mr. Speaker, there has been no submission since from the New Democratic Party. I was looking for that with some interest. And I would have thought that if they wished to speak on behalf of their members or their supporters . . . Now perhaps, Mr. Speaker, they’re caught up with other things such as the leadership convention or whatever else is taking place this week. But, Mr. Speaker, we look forward to seeing if they wish to file a late submission, and from them we would welcome it, Mr. Speaker.