

Salary Insurance Protection Fund

France and Sweden have salary protection insurance schemes and it does not cost very much. It does not cost very much but it does work. If something like that could be implemented in Canada, I think this Parliament could be very proud of itself.

Canadian legislation does not see working people as a high priority. The bankruptcy law was brought in in 1949 and ignored the needs of the employees when companies went bankrupt.

In my community, major plants have closed, and we are still waiting for the Government to bring forward some kind of legislation that will help older workers. For those who are between 45 and 55 years of age, it is often very hard to get back into the workforce after jobs disappear. We as legislators have to deal with the majority of the people, and the majority of the people in Canada are working people. Certainly our laws should protect those people. We would do this if this resolution were implemented into legislation.

This is something New Democrats have been looking for over the years. In 1980, a Senate committee recommended that kind of legislation. Again, it fell between the cracks. I suppose that the Parliament of the day prorogued and by the time the new Parliament came in, it was no longer a priority.

Again, I would like to commend my hon. colleague for bringing forward what I think is a really important issue and something that should become a priority of this Parliament. It would not be very difficult to implement quite quickly legislation that would protect workers. It would not take very long to get the agreement of all Parties in the House on this. There are some things we do not agree on, but I think we could get agreement on something like this and quickly pass it. We would be leaving a legacy in that for the first time in 40 years, we would bring forward this kind of an amendment. It would not be very difficult to do, but it would change the lives of many working people.

In February of 1987, the Hon. Member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez) introduced a Bill to change the priority of payments of claims so that wages and salaries of employees would be protected to a limit of \$9,000. This resolution calls for something like a national insurance fund paid for by all employers in Canada. It would not cost very much, and they could get a very good return on this investment. When things get tense in the workplace, employees are more productive if they are secure.

I have read editorials in Canadian newspapers dealing with how antiquated our bankruptcy laws are and how important it is to protect employees. Such legislation, however, still has not come forward. I certainly think that such legislation is long overdue.

I do not think that we would see any major opposition to such a proposal from employers. There have been enough hills and valleys in Canadian business life in this last decade that the employers realize the kinds of risks they take. It is

important that they are able to protect their employees. As well, employers can be fairly open with their employees about the risks they are taking if they know that security exists, and it would be easier to build a team spirit which is so often important, particularly for small business.

With such legislation, not only would we help employees but we would reinforce the attitude that people are important, we do not simply treat them as commodities and then toss them aside when companies go bankrupt. We would be saying that our public policy cares about people who work and respects the dignity of work. We think it is important that that kind of attitude should exist.

I see in this resolution something that would have protected many people in my riding. I hope that we do not stop at bankruptcy but look at programs that provide assistance when plants are closed as well. Many plants in my riding have been closed, including Firestone, and now another one. I do not think the workers there will get benefits. Canada Packers in Winnipeg closed as well and the workers' severance pay has been cut off. Again, we have the attitude that the workers are not important, and I do not think that that is a Canadian value. The Canadian value is to treat people with dignity, and we want to make sure that when that work ceases through no fault of their own, the workers can continue on in some way.

Very often, homes are lost, families are dislocated and there is a tremendous amount of social pressure. That is what happens when employment is lost. We need some way to bridge that, and I think the resolution the Hon. Member has put forward is the first attempt to bridge that gap.

On behalf of the New Democratic Party, I want to say that we would support any kind of legislation that would flow from this resolution. It would be a step forward. However, I would ask the Hon. Member to support us when we deal with severance pay legislation and older worker readjustment programs. I see those as part and parcel of sudden unemployment.

Many people in my riding have applied for work, but because they are older, people would not hire them. They have given up and have become social dependents. That is not what we want to see when people have put 30 or 35 years of work into society.

I would conclude by saying that this is a first step in very important amendments to the Bankruptcy Act. The entire Act must be revamped because it is archaic. It was antiquated when it was brought in, and I do not think this Government has to feel responsible for that, but I would certainly like to see it do something about it. This resolution is an important amendment that could be brought in very quickly.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Édouard Desrosiers (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve): Mr. Speaker, let me take a few minutes to congratulate the Hon. Member for Drummond (Mr. Guilbault) who tabled today what I consider to be a very important motion.