

Supply—Regional Development

about Devco opening the Lingan mine for the prime purpose of closing other operations. Again I wish to remind the minister that Bill C-135 was passed in this house for the purpose of rehabilitating and modernizing existing operations.

It should also be noted that the phasing-out period recommended in the Donald report was to take place over 15 years. Nowhere is it indicated in this legislation that its purpose is to phase out coal mines in Cape Breton. However, it is certainly indicated in the legislation that an effort should be made to revitalize, rehabilitate and modernize the mining communities. Possibly those mines that do not prove economical after this attempt is made should be phased out after 15 years. It is stated in the Devco report that the prime purpose of Bill C-135 and of the Donald report is to close down Cape Breton mines as quickly as possible. This was never the intention of the legislation. If the minister would examine the legislation closely he would find nothing in it indicating that the Cape Breton Development Corporation should close down coal mines. I should think that any effort on their part to close down coal mines should be made after they have attempted to produce some form of alternative employment. May I remind the Minister of Manpower and Immigration, who has considerable experience with labour unions, that this corporation cannot completely ignore the general agreement under which the miners have been working over a long period of years and tell them they may be pensioned off at the age of 60 or may have to take early retirement at that age.

● (4:00 p.m.)

I fail to understand the approach that Devco is using. They say these men are going to remain on the payroll, subject to recall. The men will receive a pension from Devco but that pension will be below the poverty line. Despite the fact the pension will be below the poverty line, if the men earn \$100 in one month outside the coal operation, their earnings will be returned and applied against their pension. I feel it is a rather coldblooded approach to pension them off arbitrarily at a rate below the poverty line and at the same time place a restriction on the earnings they may be able to receive outside the coal operation. As has been indicated, the men will be left on the company payroll and will be subject to recall. I did not have the opportunity to question the Devco authorities that I thought would be available. I wonder what the position of a man would be under this

early retirement scheme who found it necessary to move with his family to some other part of the province or some other part of the country and was then recalled by the company? Who is going to handle this procedure? If he is not available for work, is this man removed from pension? Presumably the corporation has already prepared itself for a situation that might develop whereby an employee who accepts early retirement can be cut off from pension rights because of his activities outside the mining industry.

The Cape Breton Development Corporation, both the coal and development sections, seems to be concentrating its efforts on the mining activities that are going to be affected by any phasing out. Early retirement should mean that the miners will be provided with an adequate pension. I repeat that the pension falls below the poverty line. I feel that the miners should be given an opportunity to earn whatever moneys they are able to earn when they are on retirement. In addition, I do not believe that the Devco plan should be in any way, shape or form subsidized by unemployment insurance benefits that any miners may have coming to them. This is an area in which the miners have been contributing. I had hoped for an opportunity to examine the Devco officials more closely and get some definite answers with regard to some of these issues connected with the early retirement proposition.

I should like the minister to give consideration to the fact that the early retirement plan should be strictly voluntary. It is something that the government should not support because, in effect, this crown corporation is bringing about compulsory retirement at age 60. I say to the minister again that I am sure he does not want to be a party to any plan of the crown corporation which would violate the general agreement under which these miners have been working for years. I hope that before the afternoon is over the minister will enlighten the house as to what his intentions are with regard to this approach.

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Chairman, the act establishing the Cape Breton Development Corporation required that the corporation present a report by October of this year. We received such a report and have had a look at it in committee. At this point I should like to ask some questions that I raised at that time and perhaps the minister could give answers which I hope will prove to be more adequate than the ones received in the committee. It