

Cape Breton Development Corporation Act

However, I must say that the government asked Devco to create new jobs, to see to the development of Cape Breton Island.

I will simply say that the statements by the hon. member for York South disregard the facts. Indeed, they are too general and unjust, not for the government, because this Crown corporation is an independent body that was created by the House of Commons, but surely for Devco which has made efforts that we may analyze together.

To make here in the House a pompous declaration to the effect that nothing has been done by Devco is unfair and irresponsible.

In the field of coal mining, Devco had no compelling reason to make an effort, for instance, to open a new mine. They did open the Linden mine which employs over 1200 workers. Nothing in the legislation compelled them to do so but they were concerned with that problem and they did do something. You may argue that it is not enough, that more could be done. All right, say so, but do not say that nothing has been done. Nobody would dare to come and say that in front of the miners because they would be the first to deny it, as did their authorized representative when he contradicted the hon. member right in my office.

Just consider, for instance, the pensioners and the pre-retirement fund. Surely, this plan is by no means perfect. No doubt it could be much more generous. We could discuss the matter at length. However, there is something striking about the fact that the miners, 55 to 60 years old, were given the choice between going on working or accepting retirement. Do you know how many of them accepted it from their own free will? I am not speaking of those who had to retire. Well, 78 per cent of those between 55 and 60 chose retirement.

So, here is another field open to criticism. You may say it is not perfect but you cannot argue that nothing has been done. It would simply be unfair. It is the hon. members' duty to inform the House and the public accurately.

I do not want to prevent criticism, far from it. People can criticize but taking the facts into account and in a rational way.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear. Of course I know—

[*English*]

Mr. MacInnis: Mr. Speaker, would the minister permit a question? While he is hot on the subject, I want to ask—

[*Mr. Marchand (Langelier).*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): Order. The hon. member for Cape Breton-East Richmond (Mr. MacInnis) wishes to ask a question if the minister will permit it.

• (8:50 p.m.)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marchand (Langelier): No, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. member behaved in a civilized way, I would have no objection to it. I never insulted him in the House. Seeing how he respects others, I do not see why I would show him more respect than he shows me.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Marchand (Langelier): I know about the lack of income of the miners. With \$3,000 a year, it is not possible to spend the winter in Florida. I have no illusion. I say, however, that if we could repeat the experience made by Devco in all parts of Canada where there are problems, this would prevent a lot of human tragedies which happen every day in the country. I know that several factories are closing down and that the workers are not protected. They do not get a pension. They are not offered any. They are simply flat broke. Ask the former employees of Canadian Vickers in Montreal.

The government took the human factor into consideration and understood the nature of the problem by offering a pension to those who had lost their job or who did not want to work in the mines past a certain age. This can be criticized; if we could do more, we should do it. I have no objection to it. But to pretend that nothing has been done for the Cape Breton miners is an insult to the Canadian people who, with their taxes, try to solve the problem. It was not enough but it can be said that a greater effort has been made there than probably anywhere else.

I am thinking, for instance, about the Bell Island mine, in Newfoundland, and the Lauzon dockyards, in Quebec. It does not mean that it is enough; with more money, we could certainly do better.

Devco is a corporation which tried to do its job but which might not have succeeded fully and—

[*English*]

Mr. Broadbent: Would the minister permit a question? Has the minister investigated himself, or had his officials investigate reports that were given to me within the past 24 hours, that many of the miners accepted early retirement—I agree with the minister that they did so voluntarily—because they were