

some feeling that there are accomplishments being made.

When we look at the act, originally it was an act that was passed in 1949. The act at that time took into consideration what was occurring coming out of the post-war years and thereafter. The wage payments were a maximum of \$500 and these payments were based on the cost of living at that time.

We certainly know in looking at the cost of living index since 1949 and the upgrade that they used to do every 10 years in revamping the scale how things have changed in that period of time. In my own personal experience, I think about when I was 15 years old fighting fires for 75 cents an hour. The first job I had in a sawmill I remember getting paid \$1.75 an hour. I left to work in a smelter and made \$1.79 an hour. This was in the mid-1960s. I moved on to a high paying job in the pulp industry at \$2.05 an hour.

You know the differences now. The mill workers now get paid \$18 to \$22 an hour. The smelter workers are slightly behind that but getting paid similar wages. That puts into perspective the type of wage that we were looking at in 1949 as opposed to the wages now in 1991. I think the member for Nickel Belt gave some examples recently where he pointed out the broad variance in that \$500 to now.

The present bill looks specifically at the amount of wages that should be topped up. It sets that limit at \$2,000. In terms of 1949 dollars my friend has pointed out it falls far short. I believe the figures he came up with were something in the area of \$5,000 to \$6,000 would be more in line with the dollar from the 1949 area.

We see right off the bat that although this bill has looked at the wage payment, the upper limit that they have set under this bill leaves something to be desired. The bill over all with some exceptions, as pointed out by other speakers, is a bill that is needed and has been needed for some period of time. It has been pointed out throughout the course of this debate that there have been many attempts—I think there were seven attempts since 1974—to amend the Bankruptcy Act.

This minister has taken the bull by the horns this time around and brought in a bill that with slight modification can probably work this time around. I think the member for Nickel Belt, the member for Dartmouth and the member for Mississauga South have pointed out very

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compellingly why the minister should listen to these changes. I believe it was the member for Calgary Southwest who talked about the reasons why super priority cannot work. It cannot work I say from the perspective of someone who has been in the labour force and has worked for the Department of Labour in employment standards. I have worked specifically on legislation dealing with payment of wages and lost wages and come up against bills such as the Bankruptcy Act, priorities and super priorities such as the priority of the federal Crown. I have also for 15 years been a member of the bar, a lawyer, and dealt with companies who are setting up, who have gone into receivership, who have been sent into receivership by the banks, and walkaways, as explained by the member for Mississauga South who have been unable to come up with sufficient assets to interest the trustee.

• (1740)

I think the member points out properly that in itself the trustees have a super priority or perhaps I should say they have a super sweet super priority. They do not go in unless they know there is money and under the act the trustee takes his or her money right off the top before secured creditors before the Crown creditors, the priority creditors, or before the unsecured creditors. Right up at the top, our super sweet super priority people, the trustees, get their money.

Yet under this bill I believe that one of the major flaws from my perspective and from that of my critic area, small business, is one that this minister should reconsider, super priority for wages.

I was a researcher for the provincial Department of Labour back in the 1970s for six or seven months in British Columbia. We constantly looked at ways of getting employees their wages.

We see the hardship that it causes and back then, almost 20 years ago, it was not uncommon to see wages owing well in excess of \$2,000. Often when a company got into problems, one of the first thing it seemed to do was miss the payment deadline.

Often many of the employees were true to their company and had worked there for a number of years. Because of the employee-employer relationship, the loyalty that they felt toward their employer, they would use their savings over a week, two weeks, three week