

ment—I am not talking about brainless—can turn a blind eye to the misery that the present act creates. Surely, after a person has worked so many years for a company and the company goes bankrupt, it is not good enough to say that they have to join a line and, in the meantime, go on welfare. In most cases, the company has not paid the UI premiums. That has to be sorted out because the Unemployment Insurance Commission goes to the back of the line, as well.

• (1320)

Surely, that is not the way a caring, feeling, sensitive society treats people who, through no fault of their own, end up losing not only their employment, but they lose the wages for which they have worked and contributed.

I know the Conservative government is looking for good ideas because it does not think of any good ideas. There is a magnificent government in the province of Ontario that is about two months old. In its first Throne Speech it has outlined its determination to come to grips with the whole question of employees getting a fair shake on their wages, benefits, and possible pensions lost as a result of bankruptcy. It is determined to move ahead with a fund, but this will only apply to provincially incorporated companies.

Where is the leadership from the federal government? I saw the government move with more action on the question of sending the *Nina*, the *Pinta* and the *Santa Maria* to the Gulf, without even the United Nations having approved it. It moved with the speed of light. Yet, Canadians are being treated unjustly, unfairly, and most shabbily.

All the government needs is the resolve to say, that yes, the workers of a company that goes bankrupt must go to the head of the line as secured creditors. I cannot stress that more firmly, Mr. Speaker. They are secured creditors. They gave hours of work as credit to the company, yet they are being treated as preferred creditors. In this case, preferred might sound nice. At the racetrack there is preferred parking, and it sounds like you are being treated special. But, in this context, preferred does not amount to a pinch of salt. A pinch of salt. The government does not give a pinch of salt.

Private Members' Business

Mr. McWilliam: It doesn't work.

Mr. Rodriguez: It doesn't work. I am not going to put salt in the wounds here.

Where is the federal leadership from the government? The government of the province of Ontario, in office only two months, has already indicated a desire to move in the direction of clearing up a problem in its own backyard with respect to the employees of bankrupt companies. Yet, the federal government, with all the vast array of personnel in the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, the vast treasury of the federal Parliament, and the people of Canada, and all we get are pious statements that it is a priority. A minister says: "It is my priority." Before the guy could realize his priority, he has gone through the revolving door and the next cardboard figure comes up for us to take target practice at. Just when we are getting warm with him, he resigns from the cabinet.

Then we get another cardboard figure coming through on the revolving door. He has been studying this question for a year now. He is just a slow studier. He studies slowly. The minister, too, now says right here in the House of Commons: "I am going to look at this proposal." A federal minister may borrow a NDP idea on worker protection in bankruptcies. He may. He is even playing on the words now. He does not say: "I will borrow." He says: "I may borrow." Of course, if he borrows that he is a secured creditor, or is he a preferred?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Rodriguez: My bill, I think, is timely. It comes at an appropriate time. It is an excellent bill, not just a good bill. It is an excellent bill. It deals with the current problem, a problem that has been festering for too long. Yet, the government, which has the responsibility to lead, has reneged on its responsibility by not acting. We cannot treat people who are unequal in an equal fashion and compound it by treating people who are unequal in an unequal fashion. The government, by closing its eyes to this blot on the escutcheon of labour and management relationships in the country, should hang its head in collective shame, that it has done nothing about this problem.

Why does the House not pass my bill and let us get on with it. If the government cannot do it, I have done it.