

Labour Adjustment Benefits

● (2010)

In our country we have a paste fix government, whether it be in the form of a budget or in terms of its constitutional proposals or now with respect to industrial and labour policies. I say to the minister who has been newly appointed that he will not only need all the incredibly hard work, of which I know he is capable, but also an enormous amount of luck, having regard to the competence of the colleagues with whom he sits in cabinet. The exception is the Minister of State for Mines (Mrs. Erola).

This government has never been known to be a government of action; but at one time Liberal governments were known as governments of reaction. They used to round up the cattle after they got out of the barn. Now when the cows get out, the government throws up its hands and shuts down the farm.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Buys a new herd.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Or buys a new herd and subsidizes it out of public money, as my colleague for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker) points out. I notice with interest the legislation's provisions for joint planning committees in cases of industrial shutdowns, the lofty objectives to develop an adjustment program to minimize the impact, the termination of employment of so-called redundant workers. I shall deal with that subsequently in my remarks.

On the basis of the provisions of this bill, I am very interested to find out exactly who will be covered by this legislation. On the basis of the provisions dealing with qualifications, I would be very surprised if there are many people left who will, in fact, qualify. If they do qualify, they will have to have met some pretty stringent qualification provisions with respect to years of employment in any particular industry. It would be far safer, if they wanted to bring benefits to those people who have become redundant, to modify the provisions of the legislation with respect to the number of years one is required to have worked in a particular industry or in a region so as to qualify for benefits. If that were the case, in light of Canada's present economic circumstances, I think we would have a larger group of Canadians who were out of work, unemployed and with no prospect of employment in the immediate future who could receive some benefit by the legislation.

With respect to this legislation, I should like to direct my attention to a particular matter of some interest and importance to me, coming as I do from Saskatchewan, in view of my responsibilities while in government. It has to do with a circumstance that has developed in our country, particularly in the province of Saskatchewan, at Uranium City. I ask rhetorically how this legislation, which was supposedly going to help people who have been put out of work through no fault of their own, and not by the dreaded private sector but by a Crown corporation, is going to be of assistance. We have listened to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Lalonde). One would think that the Crown corporation was the answer to all our industrial strategies or all our problems in Canada, because here is a corporation that allows a government to use

the corporation as an instrument of national economic policy. The Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources said that a Crown corporation is a vehicle that is accountable to the people of Canada. Wonderful words on the part of the minister with respect to the advantages of Crown corporations in our country!

The example of what has happened in Uranium City as a result of the actions and, if I may be permitted to say, the callous and cruel actions of the Crown corporation, Eldorado Nuclear Limited, would make any thinking Canadian cringe with shame and disappointment. For an instrument of the Government of Canada to take actions that are so cruel and callous with respect to a community of some 3,000 people in northern Saskatchewan, I believe, warrants an extensive and full parliamentary inquiry into this particular shutdown of an industry which seriously affects an important province and city of our country.

Legislative provisions in this area are the minimum provisions the government of the day intends to accept from its corporate citizens. In light of the legislation being presented today, I think it is interesting to consider the Crown corporation's treatment of its own employees, and the assistance the government has provided its own people. Eldorado Nuclear Limited has been operational for a number of decades. Around the mine, a thriving town of some 3,000 inhabitants has developed. In the community of Uranium City people have purchased homes, developed businesses and established their families. This is not just a resource camp moving miners in and out on a weekly basis; it is a town that has developed to serve the needs of the corporation. One would hope there would be some reciprocation in kind on the part of the government and its agency. Indeed, the town relies heavily on Eldorado Nuclear Limited. There is no other major industry that supports the community. Reports indicate that the town has a tax rate of \$4.5 million to keep water and sewer lines open, to maintain the streets and to keep the lights on. Eldorado Nuclear Limited supplies 87 per cent of this base. When Eldorado goes, the town will have less than \$1 million with which to support itself.

Eldorado Nuclear Limited has recently made extensive capital investment in the community. I should point out that the investments have led many of the residents to believe that the future for Uranium City is reasonably bright. In the last two years, \$4 million has been spent on housing and an additional \$4 million on machinery.

An hon. Member: That is to close it down.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: That is prior to closing down precipitously. Those are the kind of capital expenditures that have been made in the town of Uranium City in Saskatchewan. In the last year, as part of a \$12 million capital expenditure program \$1.2 million was spent on the mill; \$1.2 million was spent on a new food facility; and \$1.7 million was spent to complete the Charlot River power project to bring power to the mine and to the community. That is an enormous amount of money, Mr. Speaker. One hundred and fifty of the 580 homes that are