

Emergency Gold Mining Assistance Act

It is in our interest now to keep the industry operating in the interim while we continue to hope for the development of policies which will maintain the mid-north and improve it. For that reason, on behalf of the official opposition I support the motion for second reading.

Mr. Randolph Harding (Kootenay West): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to speak briefly on this bill which extends the provisions of the Emergency Gold Mining Assistance Act. Last year, when delegations came from the mining areas to the House of Commons I met members of the delegations, along with others, and heard their views about what should be done. I might say at the outset that I believe the bill which the minister has brought down for second reading this evening should receive the endorsement of the House. I realize that it means subsidizing the gold mining industry, but other factors are involved. Both speakers who preceded me have called attention to the number of jobs at stake, and this is something we cannot overlook, particularly at the present time.

● (9:40 p.m.)

I come from a mining district. While gold is not one of the major metals produced in my area, nevertheless I know what it means for mines slowly to become worked out. Once the mineral in the ground becomes exhausted, or once operations have reached the stage where mining no longer becomes profitable, a gradual decay in the community sets in until in effect it becomes a ghost town.

The thing that worries me about the Emergency Gold Mining Assistance Act is that when the legislation was first introduced, I believe in 1948, the government of the day knew it was only a matter of time before the gold mining communities would reach the point where even subsidy would not keep them alive. We had hoped that plans would have been made under the Industrial Development Incentives Act to bring new industry to these mining communities. This is essential to the continuation of the municipalities established in these areas.

I should like to point out to the House that while many people feel that a continuation of the subsidy might not be warranted, I think it has slowed down the decline of the gold mining industry throughout Canada. As a result, both the government and the small municipalities in these mining areas have been given some opportunity, an opportunity that I do not think has been fully exploited, to try to locate new industries in their areas. I presume that last year every member of the House received a copy of the brief entitled "Submission to the government of Canada on behalf of Canada's gold mining communities by the National Gold Study Committee". Some very interesting information was contained in this brief which I believe can and should be used by hon. members to support this legislation. The minister has indicated that the new subsidy is to be continued until June 1973, which gives us another 2½ years to study the situation in the areas affected and, I hope, to devise on an increasing scale some plans to bring relief to these communities through the provision of new jobs.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, I should like to refer to some of the interesting information contained in the brief. The

[Mr. Aiken.]

brief points out that many gold miners are in the older age groups. Figures I have taken from the brief indicate that over 50 per cent of the miners presently employed are 45 years of age or older, which indicates that not too many young men are exploring job opportunities in the gold mining industry. Another very interesting fact contained in the brief is that 75 per cent of the miners have had less than 10 years' education. The brief goes on to point out that it would be very difficult to effectively retrain many miners in that age group. Although they could be retrained, people in an advanced age group like this, with limited education, really present a problem.

The brief also clearly indicates that since many miners in these areas own their own homes, if mines were to close down they would be unable to move out of the district to set up a home somewhere else. First of all, there would be the difficulty of a gold miner finding a job in another area. Secondly, his lack of training in other fields would make it extremely difficult to get other work. In other words, when mines close down many of the residents would remain in the immediate area and would have to receive assistance of some kind from the municipal, the provincial or the federal government.

I think these points are an indication that this legislation must be endorsed. This assistance must be given for a further period of time. At the same time, the government must make every effort to make certain that in the areas affected some type of new industry will be established within the next two or three years. I realize some mines will close down and there will be a loss of population in the area, but this should not stop the government making every effort to ensure that alternate sources of employment are found, something that will keep the younger people in the area and enable the municipalities to continue to thrive and to grow.

I do not need to say much more, Mr. Speaker. I am convinced that once the bill has gone to committee and is sent back to the House, an opportunity will be given for further debate. I also understand the government would like to bring back, for a few more minutes' debate prior to the adjournment of the House, the investment bill which the House was debating earlier.

Hon. E. J. Benson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I move the adjournment of this debate. By unanimous consent, I would ask permission to present another recommendation from His Excellency the Governor General in respect to Bill C-3, an act respecting investment companies, which if the House so permits I will now read.

● (9:50 p.m.)

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Perhaps we should first determine whether there is unanimous agreement to adjourn the debate now before the House.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Finance seeks the agreement of the House to present a revised recommendation in connection with Bill C-3. Is this agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.