

*Labour Adjustment Benefits*

is no question about that. The only criticism I might have is the political taste of the people who live in those designated areas. They might look at another political party the next time around, one which will hopefully get this economy going again and provide meaningful jobs that will last for a long period of time.

The 800 people who will benefit from this act must be over the age of 54, have no hope whatsoever of finding employment and meet other criteria, which I will not go into in great detail today. I would, however, like to discuss a couple of matters which still concern me about this bill.

In one of the motions we are debating today, the NDP suggests that it should be the labour adjustment board which designates industries. We do not support that amendment. If an area is to be designated, it should be designated by the politician who is directly answerable to the people. A board hidden somewhere in the bureaucracy should not make those designations because it is answerable only to the minister. If the government makes these decisions, it is answerable to the people. Therefore, we feel very strongly that that amendment should not be approved by the House. The power should remain with cabinet to designate those areas and industries. The accountability is to Parliament and the people of Canada. The other motions we are debating are primarily motions by the NDP with regard to changing the responsibility for designation from cabinet to the Labour Adjustment Review Board.

There is something which concerns me about this bill that I have expressed many times. The minister and deputy minister assure me that it is not going to happen, but I am still not convinced. My concern is that the bureaucracy is involved in this. We have a cabinet which makes a decision as to what area or industry is designated so that the individuals who qualify will get the benefit of this bill. A board has been established. Its members are appointed by the minister. We assume he will take care of some of his Liberal friends. We were told in committee that the board will be made up of public servants. There has been an amendment to provide for an employee and employer representative. I congratulate the government on that; it is very important. The other three will be appointed by the minister.

We are assured that this will be a board of public servants and that it will not cost the taxpayer any money. We know that is not true. When a board is set up, no matter whether it is composed of public servants or not, the men or women on that board receive some remuneration. Therefore, it will cost the taxpayer something. To say it will not is a fallacy. The people should not be misled on that point.

The board then makes certain decisions or designations. It decides whether this or that person or this or that industry qualifies. It goes through the application and makes its decision. It then goes to the Unemployment Insurance Commission which goes through the application, decides whether the person qualifies or not and how the benefits will be doled out.

I hope a little later on someone on the government side will give a clear explanation of the need for that board and, once the designation is made by cabinet, why the work cannot be

done by bureaucrats within the Unemployment Insurance Commission, thereby eliminating that separate body. To me, it sounds like a tremendous amount of bureaucracy which in my opinion is not required. We must remember that we are talking about an individual who is over the age of 54 and has exhausted his unemployment insurance benefits. He has no hope of obtaining employment and is concerned about how he will live. He has paid for his home and would like to stay there, he could not sell it anyway because his town is a one-industry town and no one is moving in there. Therefore, the real estate market is depressed.

● (1630)

He will now have to make all these other applications. It is fine that the union can apply on his behalf so he will not have to do this individually, as the minister would say, but it is still another layer of bureaucracy, another set of applications and papers which I personally feel is unnecessary. I suggest that all this could be amalgamated with the Unemployment Insurance Commission. The deputy minister and the minister have assured me in committee that it is not a bureaucratic mess and will work fine. I have heard this said many times and that I should not worry about it. Despite the assurance of the minister I am still fearful of the bureaucracy that is involved.

We on this side will be supporting many of the government amendments, including the retroactivity of the application of the act. Presently there is a great concern for those people living in these designated areas who do not have very bright prospects of moving to new jobs or finding employment in their designated area.

We are concerned about the New Democratic Party amendments which would broaden the powers of the Labour Adjustment Reviews Board. These amendments will give it powers which are outside its jurisdiction. The NDP would like the board to have the authority to conduct investigations and require employers to open their books on demand. Of course, this is an indication of more government involvement which we feel is unnecessary. We will oppose that type of amendment.

We have not yet decided upon our reaction to Motion No. 14 respecting Clause 12, which deals with eligibility requirements and what constitutes 1,000 work hours per year. The suggestion is that if the employee is absent due to illness, a leave of absence with employer consent during the year that illness occurs would still be considered as an average work year. I will be interested to hear what my colleagues, the NDP and the government have to say on this subject. The government has indicated that the terminology used in their amendment concerning exceptions and special circumstances might satisfy the NDP amendment and make it unnecessary. However, we will have to study this particular question carefully.

This is a very important bill, Mr. Speaker, and we do not want to delay it unduly. Although it affects only 800 Canadians at the present time, with the advent of lay-offs and industry shut-downs in Canada it is obvious there will be other designated areas and other designated industries to be considered.