

*Adjournment Debate*

an ultimatum to the workers, instituting a pay freeze for one year, extending the old contract and reducing fringe benefits. No discussion has been permitted. The company will not talk to the union nor will it make any public statement.

In effect, the workers are being made the scapegoat for what the company claims are the marginal profits at Abitibi or Sault Ste. Marie. Yet the company provides no proof of this claim. I call upon it to open its books for public scrutiny so that the public and the workers can compare the figures of costs and profits. Is it only labour costs which have given rise to the predicament in which this plant finds itself? Can it be the inefficiency of the mill due to outdated equipment which Abitibi failed to modernize? Has the company been reinvesting its profits in the mill in order to keep it a viable or competitive operation? Or could it be market conditions? And are those conditions temporary or long term?

What choice do the workers have, confronted with this ultimatum? To accept it is to accept the blame for the problems of Abitibi without any proof. Naturally, the workers rejected the terms of this ultimatum. Had they accepted this ultimatum to stay on the old contract under threat that the mill would be closed down, what is to say that next year the company would not pull the same trick and say to the workers, "Stay as you are or we will close the mill"?

• (2220)

The company will make a unilateral decision on February 16. The board of directors will meet on that date and decide the fate of 500 employees and their families in Sault Ste. Marie; they will decide whether they are to continue working or be thrown out of work and into the unemployment lines. This could be an economic catastrophe of major proportions in my constituency. I am afraid that it appears to me and to many people in Sault

Ste. Marie that the company's policy appears to be "profits before people".

Therefore I put these questions to the Minister of Manpower and Immigration. Firstly, what measures does his government plan to take to prevent such overt intimidation? Secondly, what contingency plans has his department, should—and perish the thought—the company close the mill and throw 450 men out of work?

**Mr. Mark MacGuigan (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Manpower and Immigration):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate and share the concern which the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie (Mr. Symes) has expressed about this serious problem in his constituency. I am sure he realizes that the company and the unions in this case are engaged in some kind of collective bargaining, however free or unfree it may be in these particular circumstances. I think the important point that should be made is that all matters of this kind fall entirely within provincial jurisdiction. The federal government has no authority whatsoever to intervene in this labour dispute, nor has it in any other labour dispute except the few that involve workers under federal jurisdiction, largely in the transportation industry.

As to possible action by the Department of Manpower and Immigration in this situation, that will have to await the unfolding of events. The department's officers are following the situation closely and are prepared to act immediately in any problem requiring assistance in the adjustment of any workers who might be affected. Until the parties have resolved their differences, however, and pending the emergence of a real or anticipated lay-off situation, it would be impractical and improper for the department to attempt to intervene in any manner. Should a need develop for the services of the department, all applicable programs and services will be made available to assist in any way we can.

Motion agreed to and the House adjourned at 10.25 p.m.