

Labour Adjustment Benefits

work up to 11 hours in the operating trades of the railway industry. The next recommendation is:

Severance pay of one week per year of service.

Is that too much to ask for an employee being laid off? Other recommendations follow:

Relocation allowances to be paid by the employer in case of lay-offs.

Compensation payments to the community affected by lay-offs may be paid out of a special fund into which employers contribute.

I think this is a very important point which has never been examined. When lay-offs occur in small communities it becomes a local disaster, and those communities have difficulty in maintaining their schools, recreation facilities and the normal services that they provide. This bill still only proposes to designate a few employees and leave the others to try to maintain themselves and their communities. That is wrong, Mr. Speaker, and the Minister of Labour must identify those areas. The next recommendation is as follows:

A grant-levy system to ensure that all employers contribute to the cost of retraining workers.

I think that is an excellent proposal and it should not be too hard to reach agreement on it. The final recommendation is:

Changes in pension legislation to improve vesting rights and ensure portability of pensions.

These are the recommendations of the CLC to the Minister of Labour, Mr. Speaker, so I think he was wrong in his opening remarks when he said that the Canadian Labour Congress was basically in sympathy with the bill being presented.

We in this party are skeptical about the bill, Mr. Speaker. We believe that there are serious problems with lay-offs. The Minister of Labour should bring in legislation to retrain people and to find ways of keeping employment going. The lumber industry in British Columbia is a prime example of where this is needed. That industry is staggering, the country is in need of housing, but the Minister of Labour appears to want to designate such areas as ones that may qualify for some adjustment assistance.

● (1600)

How would it come about, if someone were to be able to get under those kinds of programs? If it were a designated area, and if someone were trying to participate in the program, he would want to use the rules of the Unemployment Insurance Commission. If the commission were in doubt, it would put the member before a board of referees. We all know about these boards of referees. It is a great system! A board has an employee representative and a commission representative sitting on it, and a chairman is selected. It sounds like a reasonable approach and one which should work. However, time after time we have seen a board of referees hand down a unanimous decision that someone qualifies for benefits, but the commission has made that person go to an independent umpire, one person sitting and making judgment and, nine times out of ten, the judgment is in favour of the commission. That is the way the commission wants to conduct the appeal

procedure when there is something in doubt. I think that is wrong and this portion of the bill must be corrected.

A portion of the bill increases the notice period of lay-off to 16 weeks from the current eight weeks and makes a shift adjustment in severance benefits to a maximum of five days. Again, it is weak and it is not sufficient. It needs many changes.

We in this party are opposed to Bill C-78. We will be fighting against it in committee. We will be asking witnesses to come forward to present their concerns. In fact, we will be trying to improve the bill and to bring about some other recommendations which we think can help bring about some programs which will be acceptable and will meet the needs of all people who are laid off, not only the very few. Hopefully the government, in its wisdom, will also bring about a bill to include training and other aspects under this program which will help find other areas in which people can relocate. We think it is very important that the government move very swiftly to bring about needed changes, instead of this band-aid approach which it has put before us here today.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Dave Nickerson (Western Arctic): Mr. Speaker, I might seem to be a little out of place this afternoon because it is my intention to speak on the subject matter of the bill. That has not yet been done.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nickerson: However, if Your Honour would excuse me, there are some things I would like to speak about dealing with the Canada Labour Code, which is one of the matters contained in the bill before us. There are basically two parts to this bill, one dealing with labour adjustment benefits and the second dealing with amendments to the Canada Labour Code. However, first of all, because on occasion I tend to speak for too long and am not able to say everything I would like to say, I want to address myself to some omissions in this bill, some amendments which might be made to the Canada Labour Code but which are not included in this bill. I refer to amendments which might prove very beneficial to the Northwest Territories concerning matters which my constituents and people in other parts of the Northwest Territories have tried to accomplish for very many years.

The Canada Labour Code is divided into various parts which deal with different aspects of labour law. For instance, Part III deals with labour standards. As matters rest at present, the Northwest Territories is treated in the same manner as any other jurisdiction in Canada. They are able to pass their own labour standards legislation. In fact, they have done a pretty good job with this. We have heard very little complaint concerning labour standards in that area of the country. It is good that we should be able to do this, because some of the conditions of labour in remote areas of Canada and northern Canada are quite different from those which exist, say, in the metropolitan areas of Toronto or Quebec.