

Supply—Regional Development

In this respect I think the service provided to the mining towns also needs the protection of this development corporation. I point out to the minister that the intent of the act is spelled out in the preamble. I will read part of the preamble to the minister. It provides:

And whereas the mines in the Sydney coalfield are faced with imminent closure unless a substantial capital investment is made for their rehabilitation and modernization—

Money has been provided toward that end, but the indications are that no effort is being made by the Cape Breton Development Corporation to rehabilitate these mines. It is said, of course, that it is the intention to broaden the base of the Cape Breton economy. That is all well and good. I ask the minister to explain how he feels the intent of the legislation, drawn up to protect the miners and the mining communities, will be served by the Cape Breton Development Corporation using its energies toward the development of the tourist industry. This, of course, broadens the base of the Cape Breton economy. The tourist industry has been promoted for a number of years. But I do not understand how any move in this direction by the Cape Breton Development Corporation will provide alternative jobs for displaced miners.

I hope the minister will also explain to the house later the approach of the Cape Breton Development Corporation to the early retirement plan. I agree that the early retirement plan could be acceptable to quite a few miners employed under Devco. Here again Dr. Donald did not have an original thought, because the early retirement plan was first introduced in the Nova Scotia mining communities by the Leader of the Opposition when he was premier of that province. It was introduced after considering the limited resources of the province and it was put forward strictly on a social basis. When the provincial government introduced the early retirement plan it saved \$16 million, \$18 million or \$20 million a year spent on coal subventions. Therefore the federal government has every reason to be very generous in such an early retirement plan. I ask the minister to speak to the Devco authorities and see to it that if they are going to put an early retirement plan into effect it at least surpasses the standards set out by the Economic Council of Canada. They should at least see that the early retirement plan provides benefits above the poverty level, as was quite clearly pointed out by the Economic Council of Canada. In other words, I am saying to the minister that

the early retirement plan gives the miners of Cape Breton less than the poverty level. If the federal government is introducing and is going to support this approach, while at the same time saving millions of dollars in subventions, the least it can do is make the plan worth while. The early retirement plan should provide more than the poverty level, which is now the case.

I also ask the minister to explain, since he has a considerable labour background, how the development corporation can compulsorily retire men at 60 years of age when the general agreement under which these men are working calls for retirement at the age of 65. How can they compulsorily retire a miner at 60 years of age when he is working under a general agreement which calls for his retirement at 65? Does this mean the minister supports the breaking down of bargaining units throughout the country?

I point out to the minister a question I asked in the committee. This matter is clearly spelled out in the legislation. I asked whether the early retirement plan was negotiated with the unions. I am sorry I do not have the committee reports here to verify this, but I was told in the committee there was nothing in the legislation which required Devco to negotiate such plans. Nevertheless the legislation distinctly says that any working arrangements should be carried out with all the unions that were certified under the Nova Scotia labour law prior to the coming into effect of this legislation.

I was told by the vice-president in charge of coal that when I referred to negotiating this matter with the unions I was drawing a pretty thin line, because nothing in the legislation required them to negotiate such a plan. If that is the case, nothing in the legislation gives Devco the authority to go ahead with such a plan. I ask the minister to examine all aspects of the early retirement plan and to take into consideration the fact that it provides benefits below the poverty line. They should introduce a plan which would at least make it worth while for those willing to take early or voluntary retirement, whichever it may be. I suggest that to make it worth while would mean a considerable increase in the amounts paid.

I also ask the minister when considering this particular phase of the plan to give some thought to the restrictions placed upon a miner accepting early retirement. There has been disagreement between the mines and the chairman of the board in this respect. In the