

Labour

unemployment. We can hear from those people and get some suggestions about how we can improve the Bill.

It is my hope that the committee which deals with the Bill will amend it to make it better, and send it back to the House so we can support it with greater enthusiasm.

Mr. Iain Angus (Thunder Bay—Atikokan): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in today's debate on Bill C-8, an Act to amend the Department of Labour Act. It basically provides older workers adjustment assistance.

I rise in this debate as a Member who represents a number of citizens who should have been the recipients of such programs and on behalf of others who may have to rely on them in the future, assuming my Province of Ontario and the federal Government reach an agreement. I am thinking of the people of Atikokan, a small former mining community of about 6,000. In 1979, Atikokan's whole industry was shut down and 1,100 men were thrown out of work with no other opportunities within that community for them to use their skills. Many of those people, particularly those in the 45 to 65 year old age group were for a number of reasons unable to replace their employment.

• (1650)

These men were open-pit miners. The bodies of many of them, particularly of the older men, had been abused by the kind of work they did and the equipment they operated. While they were able to continue their employment with the companies for which they worked, either Steep Rock or Caland, their skills were not marketable. No one wanted to knowingly acquire the workers' compensation nightmares of the previous employers. Neither would they choose a man of 50 if a man of 25 is available.

Second, these men lived in a community in which they had lived for 25 or more years. They had brought up families and owned homes in this community. It would have been a great expense for them to relocate should they have found employment elsewhere. They got no help from the federal Government of the day.

A co-ordinating committee was set up and civil servants came to talk to these people. Studies were done, but the bottom line was that they got no help.

Even today, there are still men younger than 65 who have no gainful employment. The community in which they live held no other opportunities for them. They could not move to underground mines within the north-west because that required different skills. There were attempts made to give them retraining opportunities, but by and large, all society did was raise their level of expectations only to pull the rug out from underneath them.

These people live in a community that has a current unemployment rate of 25 per cent. An employment study was done of half the community two years ago. Ironically, it is only in the smaller communities that one can do a really good sampling to get a sense of unemployment levels. This study showed that one out of every two residents of Atikokan who was available or willing to work held employment during that year. A large percentage of the unemployed were in the older worker category.

These people could be helped by this legislation if they were to be laid off today. However, they will not be helped because it happened too long ago. We have to learn from that experience.

All of us who come from resource-based communities know that a mine begins to die the day the first shovel is put in the ground. The resources are finite, unlike the forestry sector which at least in theory is renewable, although the federal Government and many provincial Governments have not done what they should have done to protect those resources.

In the forestry based communities, we will also see massive lay-offs because the industry has been cutting trees farther and farther away from the pulp and paper mills or sawmills. There will come a point when lay-offs will have to be made, and we are seeing that point in northwestern Ontario these days. It is partly because of what I was talking about, the greater distance between the mill and the harvesting area. Therefore the cost of production goes up. As well, it is as a result of the policies of the Government which has given in to the United States on the softwood lumber dispute. We are the victims of that, the communities that are losing employment. The people of these communities will have to rely on the \$1,100 a month maximum allowable under this program to replace decent union wages of \$15 to \$20 per hour, wages that could provide a man and a woman