

Labour Adjustment Benefits

● (2040)

It continues to state:

—programs that directly aid children have been cut with special severity: nutrition, education, and health programs. Child nutrition programs—including School Lunch, School Breakfast, Summer Food, and the Child Care Food Program—have been cut from \$4.3 billion to \$2.8 billion or 34.9 per cent.

I would like to know if those are the kinds of programs the Conservative Party is supporting. Our members in the committee which dealt with this bill in detail co-operated in the discussions and moved some amendments. A few amendments, the less important ones, were even accepted by the government. Of course, we tried, as did the Conservative members, to make it a better bill.

Mr. McDermid: I thought they were all important.

Mr. Orlikow: However, the fact is that this bill will deal with such a small percentage of the people who are really in need that, in our opinion, the bill is, to a large extent, a fake. It is a camouflage. It is an attempt by this government, as Liberal governments have done so often in the past, to give the appearance that it is doing something when, in fact, it is doing virtually nothing for the hundreds of thousands of people who have lost their jobs and the tens of thousands more who are likely to lose their jobs in the next year or so.

Let me deal with just a few of the shortcomings of the bill. The bill, for example, does not deal with the unemployed workers who have been laid off because of a recession. At the present time, they comprise the bulk of the unemployed people. Thousands of workers in the automobile industry have been laid off in the city of Windsor, which is represented by three cabinet ministers.

Mr. Waddell: Only until the next election!

Mr. Orlikow: I hope the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mr. Waddell) is right in saying that those three ministers are only here until the next election. Thousands of auto workers have been laid off, and the possibility that they will be coming back to work in the auto industry in the near future is very slim. They have been laid off because the automobile industry is in a recession. A large part of the reason the automobile industry is in such difficulty is the high interest rate policy of this government, which means that Canadians who are working cannot afford to buy cars because they cannot afford to finance the purchases. That is one of the problems.

Let me illustrate another problem. In order to qualify for assistance, a worker must work in a designated industry. The decision as to which industries will be designated, of course, is left entirely to the government. The reasons the government would designate an industry are not quite clear. However, even if a worker works in a designated industry, in order to qualify he must have worked for ten of the last 15 years and must be 54 years old. Studies have indicated that the turnover rates in industry show an average job tenure of seven to eight years. This means that most workers who work in Canadian industry would not qualify because they have not worked for ten of the

last 15 years in the industry. We suggest that that is too restrictive. However, again, the government wants to keep the numbers of those who will qualify small.

I would like to discuss benefit levels proposed in the bill. As the hon. member for Rosedale said, we are making a start for the first time. What kind of a start are we making? The benefit levels of the few people who qualify are limited to 60 per cent of the insurable earnings, according to the unemployment insurance regulations. I think the steelworkers' union has made a very reasonable suggestion that the benefits should not be 60 per cent, but 75 per cent, and not just 60 per cent of the unemployment insurable benefits, but 75 per cent of the actual earnings.

There is another important reason we feel this bill does not meet the bill. We say that the termination notice is too short. All across the country, there are companies for which workers have worked many years, and these workers are being laid off on very short notice. Some of these workers are miners who have worked in Sept-Îles and Schefferville, Thompson, Leaf Rapids and Uranium City. Because the ore body is worked out, or because of the recession, or because of a slowdown in the economy, the worker loses his job. We do not believe that a termination notice of four to 16 weeks is sufficient. We believe that the termination notice in these kinds of cases should be at least six months.

When a worker in a one-industry town loses his job, his difficulties are infinitely greater than those of the worker who lives in one of Canada's cities, because that worker may find another job in the same industry. If he cannot find another job in the same industry, he will at least be able to move to another city or to another area where there is more economic activity and where he can find a job. He can usually sell his home. For most Canadian workers, the equity they have in their homes is the only equity which they have ever been able to accumulate. What is happening in towns like Thompson and Leaf Rapids in Manitoba, towns like Sept-Îles and Schefferville in Quebec, towns like Uranium City in Saskatchewan, and towns like Sudbury in Ontario? The workers are losing their jobs. They are from these one-industry towns. They are not likely to get their jobs back. They are finding that they have to move. They are finding that they cannot sell their homes. They are having to start all over after years of living in one city or in one town and years of working for one company, through no fault of their own.

We say that the company has usually been able to look after itself. Over a period of years, the company has, quite properly, been using our tax laws to get back, through depreciation allowances, the investment which it put into establishing the mine; not so the worker. The worker is left completely helpless. He is left with nothing. We say that if we are serious, if the government meant to do something real for the workers for whom it claims to have a concern, the termination notice would be at least six months.

The minister and the government have made a great deal of the fact that under this bill, for the first time, we will have established joint labour management committees, as the gov-