

Textile and Clothing Board Act

country as a whole but which have adverse effects on certain people—should not carry the entire burden of the change. So, I commend the government for bringing forward this plan. But I ask the minister in all honesty: is this a special case for the textile industry. If it is, I cannot accept it. If this is a first step in a general policy of assisting workers or farmers who are required to make major changes in their lives as a result of government action, that is another matter.

In the last few years, and I am not thinking of 40 or 50 years ago, a number of changes have taken place. I have not seen in those cases the kind of generous, far-sighted treatment proposed by the government for the textile workers. For example, there is the situation in the boot and shoe industry, an industry which is not of much direct concern in my own constituency, but the boot and shoe industry, like the textile and clothing industry, has been put through the wringer in recent years as a result of heavy imports from abroad. Companies have closed down and workers have lost their jobs. Have boot and shoe workers benefitted from the kind of treatment now proposed for the textile workers? If they did, I have not heard about it.

As we know, the coal mines of Cape Breton Island and Nova Scotia are being phased out. I realize that for years the production of coal was subsidized very heavily, too heavily, probably, if the industry was to be brought into real shape. Then, the government decided that the industry had to be rationalized, and I agree that this was the proper course. As a result of rationalization a large number of coal miners have lost their jobs or will lose their jobs. I am not expert on this subject, as are hon. members from Cape Breton, but I have seen some of the cheques amounting to a dollar or two for a week, for a two-week period, which coal miners have received. The minister looks at me in disbelief, but one of the hon. members from Cape Breton has shown me a photostat of one of these cheques for 80 cents. This is the kind of treatment the coal miners of Cape Breton receive.

Consider the case of railway employees. Not a week goes by when one of the railway companies does not announce another closing of a line or the discontinuance of a passenger train or the removal of a dining-car service. All these changes have one result, a reduction in the staff of the railways. I think I have as many railway workers living in my constituency as any Member of Parliament in Canada, but I have not heard that the kind of proposals put forward today applied to railway workers also. I know there is a fund to compensate workers who are laid off by the railway companies as a result of technological change, but that fund has been built up by the workers' own contributions; they could have taken this money in wage increases had they not been so concerned about the effect of technological change on their opportunities to work. There has been no evidence of this kind of generous and far-sighted approach to the problems of unemployed railway workers.

Take the case of the workers who were affected by the decision of Air Canada to phase out the maintenance base in Winnipeg, which at one time employed

[Mr. Orlikow.]

several thousand workers, and to transfer this operation to Dorval. It is true the employees, particularly those who had worked for Air Canada for years, were given an opportunity, based on their seniority, to transfer to Dorval. I think that is proper. But there were many employees working in Winnipeg who were over 54 years of age and who had lived in Winnipeg all their lives. They were required to move to Dorval or lose their jobs. I do not recall that the Government of Canada or Air Canada said to these workers: You only have five, six or seven years of employment left before you have to retire, so we shall offer you the opportunity of early retirement on a generous pension to which the Government of Canada or Air Canada will contribute to enable you to remain in Winnipeg where you have lived all your life, where you own your own home, where your friends and interests are, and where you are looking forward to retirement. We did not see this attitude towards the workers of Air Canada, those in the boot and shoe industry of Ontario or the coal miners of Nova Scotia. Neither did we see it extended to the railway workers, no matter in which part of Canada they worked.

● (2:20 p.m.)

So, while I support the principle of this bill and commend the government for its very humane approach to textile workers, mainly in the province of Quebec but also in Ontario, who will be laid off as the result of the government's policy of encouraging the rationalization of this industry, at the same time I think that what is good for these workers is just as good and correct for workers in other industries in Canada.

I hope I am wrong, and that this bill is not just a political ploy for the benefit of Quebec. I hope it is just the first step in a policy that will be expanded into industries in other parts of Canada, so that workers displaced by technological change or by changes in government trade and tariff policy will not have to bear the entire brunt by becoming unemployed and suffering loss of income but will be given the same kind of quite generous and far-sighted supplementary unemployment insurance benefits and early retirement plans of the type proposed in this bill.

[Translation]

Mr. Romuald Rodrigue (Beauce): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-215, entitled Textile and Clothing Board Act, has great importance in the light of the situation prevailing in Canada.

I have another reason for taking a special interest in the bill, which is that over 1,000 voters in my district derive their livelihood directly or indirectly from the textile industry.

I am therefore very happy that the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Pepin) has introduced this legislation which will, I am convinced, be profitable not only to industry owners but also to workers.

On the other hand, experience has demonstrated that boards have never succeeded in solving all the problems put before them. In some cases, they have, it is true, been