

Congratulations should, of course, go to the Minister of Labour (Mr. Caccia), who has shown that his main concern is to provide fair treatment for all persons affected by the bill. He collaborated with us on several occasions when a decision had to be made on amendments proposed by various members of the committee. The minister promised us that certain amendments that committee members could not move in committee would be moved by the minister at the report stage. He has kept his word, I am happy to say, and I also note that major changes were made in Clause 12(b) with respect to qualification for benefits. A brief submitted by the eastern townships regional development board drew the attention of committee members to a major shortcoming in the present definition of Bill C-78 with respect to qualification for benefits.

I believe previous speakers also raised the problem regarding the annual average of 1,000 hours of employment, which would mean that an employee who during the last ten years had worked 1,000 hours per year, totalling 10,000 hours in the industry, could qualify for benefits, but an employee who had worked an average 2,000 hours per year during the last ten years and, for reasons beyond his control, had been unable to work during one of those years, would not qualify, although he had worked a total of 18,000 hours during those ten years. Fortunately, the minister accepted the representations made to him in committee. Today, he is bringing in an amendment to correct this deficiency in the bill, and the committee certainly deserves much of the credit for this major change.

In committee, there was some concern about people who were already drawing benefits under an existing program also included in the bill. These are former workers in the textile and footwear industries. The benefits they are receiving would not be indexed as provided in the bill until benefit recipients under the new program were receiving the same amount. This section of the bill was discussed at length in committee, and if I understood the minister correctly, he was to change clause 34 so as to remove this inequity. I therefore share the concern shown by several committee members with respect to those already receiving benefits and, once more, I am pleased to see that the minister is making the required changes.

The Labour Adjustment Benefits Program is only one aspect of the Industry and Labour Adjustment Program which is available to communities and cabinet-designated industrial sectors, and which offers various labour adjustment measures and industrial incentives. In addition, the government paid particular attention to those industries which are experiencing economic difficulties—textiles, for instance—and among other things created the Canadian Industrial Renewal Board. The Canada Employment and Immigration Commission also implements a whole series of labour adjustment measures with respect to mobility, increased proficiency and job creation.

The program will help workers aged 54 to 65 who can hardly be expected to relocate and who are not directly

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concerned by other labour adjustment measures. Generally speaking, those people are not highly qualified and not in great demand, not to mention the fact that they do find it hard to get back into the labour force. In cases of serious difficulties, people over 50 who have worked very long years in the sector involved may be entitled to benefits.

Some hon. members seem to fear that anyone receiving benefits will have no incentive to return to work. Well, since only 60 cents will be deducted from the benefits for each dollar earned during the implementation of this program, those people can continue to work without fear of having their benefits cut off. In addition, should they hold a permanent job during the implementation of the program they do not lose their entitlement to adjustment benefits. Finally, every six months the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission will review employment opportunities with the recipients. Mr. Speaker, so far no one can be accused of dragging his feet with respect to the adoption of this bill and I hope the House will pass it soon so that the many workers now experiencing hardships will be able to benefit from this worth-while measure.

● (1620)

[English]

Mr. John McDermid (Brampton-Georgetown): Mr. Speaker, I rise to participate in the report stage of Bill C-78, to provide for the payment of benefits to laid-off employees and to amend the Canada Labour Code. May I say at the outset that I thoroughly enjoyed my work on the committee. My colleague from Rosedale (Mr. Crombie) and other colleagues participated in the work of the committee which was very beneficial.

I was concerned when the committee met last December. A few members of the government wished to ram this bill through in the remaining three or four days before the Christmas recess. After a great deal of discussion among members from all sides of the House, including the chairman who just participated in this debate, it was decided it would only be fair to allow those interested to make representations and suggestions to the committee with regard to the bill. Of course, this came about.

I must say that we had some spirited meetings. I am sure the minister and all those who participated will agree it was a very worth-while exercise. There were some tremendous representations from many interested groups, labour unions, employer groups and individuals interested in the bill.

This is an important bill. The problem is that it affects so few people. Once this bill passes, if my figures are correct, it will probably affect only some 800 people in Canada. That is all we are talking about at the present time.

I gather from what my colleague in the New Democratic Party stated that all designated areas under this bill so far are Liberal ridings, with the exception of one. That riding belongs to the NDP. I have no criticism of that. I feel that every area designated to date is indeed in need of this type of help; there