Labour Adjustment Benefits

stretch. The government should bring in legislation governing hours of work as this is a very significant factor in any industry when it comes to the health and safety of the workers.

I should like to mention legislation which is planned by the government of Quebec, Mr. Speaker. This will demand full disclosure of the reasons for a lay-off. That is a good idea and I wonder why the bill before us does not contain such a measure.

Some people have expressed surprise that the president of the Canadian Labour Congress was impolite to cabinet ministers. But Mr. Speaker, how could a man representing working Canadians, many of whom have lost their jobs or stand to lose them, behave otherwise? This government treats working Canadians with complete contempt. First of all, it introduces economic policies that destroy hundreds of thousands of jobs, then it brings in a penny ante fraud piece of legislation like this one and pretends it is doing something about unemployment. Mr. McDermott has not been excessive, Mr. Speaker; the government has been excessive in the way it has treated Canadians.

I should like to express my appreciation to the Minister of Labour (Mr. Caccia) for being available to the committee on this his first piece of legislation, and for listening to the concerns of each group. I must also express disappointment, however, at the firmness of his opposition to even the simplest changes. We wanted to amend the legislation to read that the minister "shall" do certain things after an investigation. If an employee had less than 1,000 hours of work in a particular year because he happened to be laid off, or if he was sick and could prove it and had close to the 1,000 hours, as the legislation now reads the minister "may" allow him the average. We asked that the word "may" be amended to "shall". That is a simple change, Mr. Speaker. I as a trade unionist know and the deputy minister also knows that the word "may" is a very important word in union agreements.

Mr. Berger: You called it simple a few seconds ago.

Mr. Parker: It is simple for this reason, Mr. Speaker. We are dealing with one simple piece of legislation which governs hours of work—1,000 hours of work per year for ten years. We asked for a simple change, and the minister could have made it, which would have ensured that if one worker were sick and another was not, there would be no appearance of discrimination. If the word "may" is retained, then the minister may make a decision which one employee may regard as discriminating against him, so I am disappointed that the minister does not consent to change that word to "shall".

Mr. Caccia: You know it is not correct.

Mr. Parker: The minister says that I know it is not correct. I want to say to him that in committee we fought to have that portion of the bill changed to provide for an average of 1,000 hours per year during that ten-year period, but he would not accept the proposed change.

I admit that the minister's amendments did improve the bill but he did not give us the change that we wanted, the word

"shall" instead of "may". I want to make that point very clear for the benefit of the Conservative Party critic who sat on the committee and heard representations from these various groups. He and the Conservative Party should be ashamed that he is not here to speak on the bill and to represent those people who appeared before the committee to express their concerns as to why they felt the bill was meaningless and limited.

● (1730)

Who is the official opposition in the House? There were four amendments upon which we voted this afternoon. Many more amendments were drafted and put before the committee. Some were ruled out because it was said that they dealt with money matters and could not be accepted. Where were Conservative Party members after hearing from these groups and companies which came forward? They did not have the courage to bring one amendment before the House of Commons. They did not have the courage to rise in the House to tell Canadians how limited and poorly drafted is the bill.

Mr. Lyle S. Kristiansen (Kootenay West): Mr. Speaker, we will do what we can to ensure that the bill is disposed of prior to the end of the session this afternoon, so that we can move on to the other business. We have no intention or desire to delay unduly this piece of legislation. Although we regard it as inadequate, it will be of minimal benefit to some people at least.

In commencing my remarks this afternoon, let me say that nothing more than this debate exemplifies the feeling among many people in the work force across the country that there are too many academics, idealists and lawyers in the House of Commons. I am referring to those who are out of touch and floating on cloud nine and to the legal minds which think that because some wording is in a piece of legislation it will mean something. It will not mean a darn thing out on the factory floor or to the people who are used to dealing with bureaucracy. They are not accustomed to winning decisions where flexibility is the rule, in terms of awarding benefits to which they are properly entitled. They are uncertain as to whether these words will be interpreted to their benefit. While many people benefit from legislation, there are many others who should benefit from such and such a scheme if they fulfil this or that requirement. As long as the word "may" continues to creep into administrative tribunals with the interpretation often given it, there are people who find themselves left out in the cold, even though they have gone as far as they can in meeting various requirements.

I am not trying to suggest that blue collar or industrial workers are superior to others. The problem is that there is no balance either in this assembly or in any legislative assembly across the country. The suspicions and experiences of the workers on a factory floor indicate that what is in a contract does not mean a damn, unless they have the means to enforce it. They think that what is contained in legislation does not matter if the enforcers or the enforcement mechanisms are not