

Labour Adjustment Benefits

be reworded in such a way that industries facing dislocation, if that is the term, as a result of export competition can be helped in the same way as those in the manufacturing sector?

There are a number of issues related to that which I and my colleagues will raise in clause by clause consideration, but I should like to say a few words now about the Labour Code amendments in the second half of the bill. It is here, Mr. Speaker, I think I feel the greatest sense of accomplishment, not only for myself but for my colleagues, as to what was achieved in committee. I do not say that in a partisan way because I believe it applies to members of all parties. We were able to achieve some changes so that at least some of the structures, such as the joint committees established under this legislation, having been given warning of the change to 16 weeks for advance notice, will be able to do a more effective job. I say this because we eliminated from the original bill some of the provisions which would have prevented those committees from looking a little beyond trying to find new jobs for people to see if something could not be done to review the initial decision to close down, lay off or terminate. By this I mean using the time afforded by this more adequate notice in order to put new mechanisms and initiatives in place so that those lay-offs and terminations may in fact need not take place. In committee we eliminated those sections which restricted the joint committees from even considering that option. We then put positive amendments in place which suggested that they do look at those more positive options for saving the jobs or altering the form of the jobs.

● (1610)

We hope that during the amendment process the House will correct one of the weaknesses which we still see remaining. We do have one amendment which will deal with it. We suggest that those joint committees and the officials working in conjunction with them be allowed access to the information required in order to carry out the duties with which they are charged under the legislation. What is the point of telling people that they can review a decision, that they can develop adjustment programs to change that decision, and that they can create new jobs or maintain jobs, if we do not even allow them to get into the area of asking for, not to mention demanding, the financial and economic information from the employer, whether public or private, which anyone would need in order to make a rational judgment of what should follow? Once we have accepted one premise, we must surely consider the other, and we must seriously consider it.

We have a number of amendments, comprising 13 in all, I believe. They are standing in my name on behalf of my colleagues. I would ask that the minister and the House give careful consideration to all of them. One in particular arose from the brief submitted by the Regional Development Council from eastern Quebec. I believe it was also raised within the steelworkers' brief, and perhaps one or two others. It dealt with the averaging of hours rather than insisting that there be a definite minimum of 1,000 paid hours per year. We have not chosen to alter the current wording within the bill to denote averaging.

I do not believe it was ever the intent of hon. members of the House or the intent of the minister that people who have lost some of their 1,000 hours in a given year should be disregarded. These people may have been on disability insurance, on workmen's compensation, on sick benefits, or some type of leave of absence which was authorized by their employers. We do not believe it was ever the intent that anyone in that category should be disregarded simply because they did not have what could be narrowly defined as 1,000 paid hours. If the House and the government would seriously consider that amendment, I believe we would find that all hon. members of goodwill would resolve one of the questions which was raised by a number of the delegations before the committee.

In concluding, I would say we have mixed feelings about the bill, but that is the case concerning any human endeavour. I do want to say again that within the committee we did feel there was a genuine attempt on the part of all parties to come to some kind of an agreement. Whether we end up with the unanimous opinion of this House or not when we get to the end of the road on this piece of legislation, I believe there will have been a positive contribution by all parties. I hope that consideration of the amendments put forward by our party and the government will be equally generous and understanding. Again, regardless of the final outcome of our various decisions, I hope we will produce what will be of maximum benefit to the maximum number of people. I hope there will be flexibility so that whoever may comprise the Government of Canada in the course of time may be able to bring the maximum amount of justice to the maximum number of Canadians.

Mr. Lewis: We undertake to do that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Arthur Portelance (Gamelin): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have this opportunity to speak to Bill C-78, an act to provide for the payment of benefits to laid-off employees and to amend the Canada Labour Code.

On December 14 of last year, the House ordered Bill C-78 referred to the Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration, whose meetings I had the honour of chairing. I should like to thank my committee colleagues who showed their co-operation throughout consideration of the bill and with whose support the committee was able to establish a working schedule under which all interested groups were able to appear before the committee. I also wish to thank all witnesses, groups and associations that appeared before the committee. To their credit, committee members sat through long sessions during which they questioned witnesses, absorbed the information provided and obtained a better understanding of the implications of the bill before the committee. All my colleagues, I am sure, found the representations made by witnesses appearing before the committee very useful. In fact, a number of recommendations made before the committee were instrumental in bringing about vital changes in the initial bill. Thus, the bill before the House today has been improved as a result of amendments made and passed in committee.