

Plant Closures

notion introduced by my hon. colleague, which I rise to support.

It seems to me to be an eminently supportable resolution. It states:

That, in the opinion of this House, the Government should consider the advisability of introducing legislation to prevent plant closures, which would require any corporation that had received federal funding to make public the books of any plant it proposed to shut down and would require any shutdown to be justified by demonstrating long-term losses.

It is not very surprising that my colleague should rise to advocate this resolution because, as he has indicated, Windsor has been the victim of a number of plant closures and office closures as well, which have affected hundreds of Windsor workers. We are concerned about that, particularly in the context of free trade.

Parts manufacturers, which constitute a major portion of our economy, are severely threatened. My colleague has referred to the report of the committee on that subject. It is well substantiated. We are sincerely concerned about the effects of the free trade agreement, the potentially higher value of the dollar, the exchange rate. These are of great concern. Let me cite some examples of closures which have occurred in Windsor which deeply concern our community: Armson Iron, Cross-LaSalle, Controlled Systems, Dominion Forge, Essex Mould, Great Lakes Forgings, Jaloy Manufacturing, Namasco, Sheller-Globe and Summerville Industries. Two of these companies, specifically Sheller-Globe and Cross-LaSalle, were closed because they were bought out by U.S. firms. There was no indication they were in such severe financial straits that they had to be closed down. They may well, on the basis of purchase, have provided the jobs in Windsor that were lost as a consequence of these closures.

On the one hand, we heard the ecstatic appraisal of market forces by the earlier spokesman on the government side, as if there existed free enterprise in a vacuum. The argument my colleague makes is that if there are federal grants—and there are a great many of these—which are provided to industries, that should incur an obligation on the part of those industries to recognize their obligation to the Government, to the workers and to the community which has served them so well. Even without such grants, there would still be a significant contribution made by almost any community to any industry. I think, for example, of the Ford Engine Plant in Windsor. Nearly \$400 million in government money was spent in order to provide the base for the construction of that plant. The municipality, the council on which I serve, spent tremendous amounts of capital resources of the city when things were very tight to ensure that the GM Plant in Windsor could operate with a basis of a sound infrastructure, the kind of infrastructure, of course, the Government denies it has any responsibility for whatsoever.

We hear a Member, such as the Member who spoke earlier, talk about market forces in an ecstatic religious fashion. As other Members have pointed out, that underlies the notion of the free trade agreement which is, of course, the Government's

means of releasing the shackles of government involvement in private enterprise at the expense of workers. That explains government Members' opposition to this very mild motion. But it is curious to hear the virtual unanimity with which the Government provides speakers who oppose any effort to protect the interests of workers. Yet, I have in my hand a document just recently released with the unanimous agreement of all Parties. I want to read the justification for a far wider scope of action which respect to plant closures. I quote from the report of the Human Rights Committee. It is entitled "Human Rights and Aging in Canada". I quote from page 30:

It is the view of the committee that, while the enhanced employment programs recommended above are urgently needed, they are unlikely to be sufficient, by themselves, to remedy the special predicament of the laid-off older worker.

They are the ones most affected by these plant closures we are talking about today. It continues:

In the absence of mandatory closures notification, closures can happen overnight, preventing workers from making long-term arrangements to move or acquire different skills. The absence of notification can also prevent workers from making financial arrangements, which may be critically important if severance pay is inadequate. Takeovers can have the same effects, and, as recent cases have shown, can also involve the absorption of pension funds, thus depriving individuals of their pensions. The impact of this on older workers, who may have been employed by the same company for many years and been dependent on a single pension fund, can be devastating.

There may, furthermore, be ways of reducing the incidence of plant closures, without impeding longer-term corporate adjustment.

That can be done with the unanimous agreement of all three Parties in this House. It goes on:

The use of Investment Canada in minimizing any adverse employment impacts of foreign takeovers, and the targeting of regional development spending to assist the growth of new businesses in areas hit by major closures, are possible approaches.

We go on to recommend that the federal Government and the provincial Government act to protect workers, at least in respect to the notification of plant closures and, subsequently, by actions to protect the workers—

● (1800)

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): I regret to interrupt the Hon. Member but the time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): The Hon. Member for Spadina on a point of order.

Mr. Heap: Madam Speaker, I wish to withdraw my motion No. 202 concerning Nicaragua, and I therefore seek the unanimous consent of the House to do so.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): The House has heard the request of the Hon. Member for Spadina. Is there unanimous consent?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Motion (Mr. Heap) withdrawn.