

Canada Labour Code

The bill introduced by the hon. member among other things, provides for the following:

An employee who is declared redundant by his employer . . .

There may be so many cases where an employee may be laid off without being redundant. This is not quite clear. And here again it says:

. . . or who ceases to be employed by him as a result of circumstances beyond the employee's control . . .

Here again, many cases may be found where employees are laid off for reasons beyond their will. This is quite ambiguous and before supporting this bill, I would have liked the hon. member to give further particulars.

I would have preferred a further narrowing down of the category of employees to whom he would like this bill to apply; it certainly contains good things but then they should have been explained at greater length.

Clause (2) reads as follows and I quote:

This section does not apply to

(a) an employee who has become entitled to receive a payment or payments under any superannuation or pension plan whether statutory or otherwise;

Then, if I understand properly, this excludes all employees who are eligible to a pension plan of any kind and particularly in this case to the Quebec Pension Plan and also all employees who are eligible for unemployment benefits; other classes of employees are also excluded and this should also have been explained.

Subsection (b) reads as follows, and I quote:

an employee who dies while employed;

I think that this category of employees who die while employed should have been covered by the legislation and here I have in mind the wife of a man who dies while employed by a corporation and suddenly sees herself without any income. She may have several accounts to pay and have no income. If her husband was insured she should receive insurance benefits, I agree, but it takes months and months before insurance companies make that payment.

An hon. Member: Is this not covered by the pension plan?

Mrs. Morin: Yes, these would be excluded. I wonder why the hon. member rejects employees who die. I really think that the spouse had a right to that benefit.

I repeat that I am not opposed to this bill. It has many good things, but there are some vague points that should have been explained further.

Paragraph (c) of the bill reads as follows, and I quote:

(c) an employee whose period of employment by the employer . . . extends for less than 12 months.

Again, a class of people who need help have been excluded. I am referring to seasonal employees, lumberjacks who work in camps for five or six months in winter. Well, they are excluded from any benefits by this bill, yet they are the ones who most need our help.

I still have in mind seasonal workers in tobacco, fruit or vegetable harvesting. If their period of employment extends for less than 12 months, they would also be

excluded. I wonder why the hon. member excluded those categories of people.

I repeat that there are good things in the bill, but why was it not better explained?

In addition, I had the honour as councillor of the town of Sillery, to take part in the drafting of several collective agreements and let me say, Mr. Speaker, that collective agreements often clearly stipulate that the employee shall be entitled to severance pay should he leave his job. Many collective agreements so provide. I also have in mind the small businesses having three or four employees.

The bill specifies that severance pay should be of such or such an amount as provided in section 3 and that it should not exceed \$1,000. It seems to me that small businesses would have their hands tied. Some employers can pay a small severance pay but if a certain amount is stipulated by law, it seems that this would be a disservice to small companies. I think that this would lead them to bankruptcy. Here again I blame the hon. member for failing to think of the small employers.

For all these reasons, I think that Bill C-44 contains several good things. However, it includes some very unintelligible provisions that will not facilitate the work of certain employers.

Once again I am not against the bill but I would like the hon. member to improve it.

[*English*]

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Order, please. Is the hon. member rising on a point of order?

Mr. Peters: No, Mr. Speaker. I wish to close the debate.

Mr. John M. Reid (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, the bill which we are discussing proposes to provide to employees who lose their employment through redundancy a form of income, or severance pay. In looking at the existing programs of this government in the administration of Canada I think it is quite clear that in many cases this kind of severance pay is not required.

It seems to me that what is required for a worker who loses his job through no fault of his own, where his job is made redundant, is not a sum of money no matter how generous but, rather, retraining in order to acquire skills necessary to obtain a new job among those which are evolving, and also the possibility of finding out where new jobs are which call for the level of skill he now has or might acquire; and, thirdly, some method to get him to the location where the job may be if there is none in his own locality.

Whether or not one receives severance pay from a former job seems to me irrelevant to the point when trying to find a place in the work force for the person who has been hit by redundancy. Therefore, I believe we must look, in discussing this bill, at the adequacy of the measures that have been developed by the Department of Manpower and by the Unemployment Insurance Commission in respect of retraining programs which are in operation today, or possibilities for employment.