

Employment Support Bill

first three months will not save half of the 40,000 jobs, if it saves any jobs at all.

If the situation is as critical as his department suggested, the minister at least ought to have come before this House with an amount of money that looked as if it might be adequate to deal with the fate of 40,000 jobs in the first three months, and 70,000 jobs in the first six months. He knows, the Minister of Finance knows, and their advisers know that \$80 million will not touch 40,000 jobs in three months, let alone 70,000 jobs in the first six months. Therefore, even on its own face, this bill is utterly inadequate, and I would say that the amount is picayune.

It is most significant, and I am sure every member of the House noticed, that the minister gave us all sorts of figures about what might happen in view of the surtax, but not once did he tell us how many jobs he thought could be saved through the bill that he has proposed. This is because he does not know, or else because he knows perfectly well that even if he spends the entire \$80 million on a proper basis he is not going to affect unemployment in any serious way. There is not a member of this House who is not concerned about the added unemployment that the 10 per cent surtax might create in Canada. But, Mr. Speaker, I am just as concerned about the more than half million people who were already on the unemployment rolls in the middle of July, and about the further unemployment that will occur as a result of government policies this fall and winter. It is not enough to try, in a picayune way, to deal with the added unemployment that may result from the surtax in the United States unless one takes measures to deal with the entire economy and to reduce unemployment altogether in this country to acceptable levels. The fact that the government is saying nothing about that means that the steps which the minister is proposing will not do anything or very little for the people of Canada.

All of the criteria are to be placed in the regulations. The minister told us something about what some of those criteria will be. The bill and the regulations use words like "likely", people who are "likely to be unemployed," and words such as "significantly" and "a significant number." The minister pleads that there has got to be flexibility. I agree with him about the necessity for flexibility in general terms but somebody has to tell us, and I hope the standing committee will be told, what is the meaning of the word "likely" and what is the concept of the word "significant." Is it 10 per cent, 20 per cent or 30 per cent unemployed in a plant?

I remind the minister that he was not satisfied with saying that people will have to meet the criteria in order to get the grants. I remind him that he goes on to say in clause 15—and I am paraphrasing—that if a company does not meet the criteria set out in the regulations then the cabinet, not the board, or not the commission, may nonetheless make grants under this bill to such a firm. I see the greatest possible danger in abuse both by the board, which will have all this immense discretion, and by the cabinet that has discretion to go even beyond the

[Mr. Lewis.]

law and the regulations to make grants to companies that may not meet the criteria here set out. At least under DREE when a grant is made there has to be a new plant or modernization of a plant, and when grants are made through the Textile Board they are to modernize the industry so that the economy may be improved. By contrast, this is a straight welfare grant to a company, which may or may not use it in order to protect its workers, despite the safeguards that are supposed to be in the bill. It is a grant to the company.

● (4:30 p.m.)

Significantly, Mr. Speaker, I ask you to note that when the minister spoke about the board and about the non-civil servants on the board, if I heard him correctly—and his mike did not work as well as I would have liked—but if I heard him correctly when he talked about the non-civil service members of the board, he talked about industrialists and about merchants—"Les industriels et les commerçants". That is what he talked about. Not a word about the workers and not a word about the unions being represented on the board. You have four mandarins of the public service plus industrialists and merchants on the board—to guarantee what? To guarantee that the working people are going to get anything out of this?

Mr. Gibson: Yes.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Lewis: If the answer is yes, then I simply say to the government that we in the New Democratic Party have had too long an experience with the mandarins and industrialists and merchants supposed to protect the welfare of workers not to know that it will not be done unless the workers or unions are represented. It never occurred to the minister that such should be the case. It never occurred to him, even as a piece of tokenism, to have one representative of the unions on the board. It occurs to him to have his own mandarins and his own industrialists and merchants, but not the people who speak for the workers in the plant whose interests he is supposed to protect.

Mr. Woolliams: It will be a Liberal board.

Mr. Lewis: How much of these grants will go to protect the jobs of workers and how much will go to preserve the profit level of the companies? What will the minister do to make certain that these grants are not merely preserving the profit level of the company? There are circumstances in which a company ought to be ready to make less profit.

I think the most disturbing part of the minister's proposal and the minister's speech is his constant reference to the fact that this is a temporary emergency measure. He says that he does not know whether the surtax will last three months, six months or a year—