

*Labour Adjustment Benefits*

Canadians who are privileged to have union representation are often able to succeed in their appeals to the commission through boards of referees, six to eight times more often than those who do not have the benefit of union representation. Many Canadians who have strong unions will be able to find their way through the maze and to receive protection, but those thousands of other Canadians who do not have that representation will be totally lost in their attempts to claim their legitimate rights under the provisions of this bill.

I am disappointed by the fact that this legislation exists in a vacuum. I believe that the government must re-examine its motivation and its conscience and ultimately find the will and determination to take positive action—not patchwork and band-aid—to mitigate the effects of its own policies to date which have so severely hamstrung the Canadian economy and have driven hundreds of thousands of proud working Canadians into bankruptcy and unemployment.

**Hon. J. Robert Howie (York-Sunbury):** Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to congratulate the minister on the assumption of his duties and wish him well in helping the workers of Canada.

This bill reflects Labour Canada's participation in the \$350 million industry and labour adjustment program announced in January of this year by the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Gray), the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. De Bane), the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Axworthy) and the Minister of Labour (Mr. Caccia).

One of the main features of the bill, an early retirement pension for employees unable to obtain alternative employment, has been in operation in the clothing, textile and footwear industries for several years. The bill permits the immediate extension of this provision to qualified persons in communities in Ontario and Quebec and Sydney, Nova Scotia, as well as to industries which are, or are to be, designated under the program.

Job creation, job-finding, mobility and training are measures in place to assist unemployed workers and will now be joined with early retirement as a last resort for helping affected workers. The industries involved are those which are subject to import competition or are encouraged by government policies and programs to restructure their operations. In case of economic pressures, the cabinet can designate industries in specific geographic areas for these benefits.

The program supplies a slender safety net for workers in the 54 to 65 year old age group who are employed in the selected industries of clothing, textiles and footwear. As well, it makes special mention of 30-year workers in the 50 to 54 year old age group.

But what about the majority of the Canadian work force which is employed by small business, farming, forestry, mining and fishing? The Georgia Pacific Veneer plant at McAdam, New Brunswick, is the only industry in the village. It closed its doors this year and there is no alternative employment for its

workers. Are these workers to be excluded because they do not make textiles or footwear?

Over half the lumber mills in the Atlantic provinces are closed and hundreds of people are unemployed. American export markets are closed and the whole housing and building industries are in recession. Are the workers in our mills—most of them employing less than 50 people—not to be eligible because their industry is not identified or because the cabinet has not identified their geographic area for benefits?

I propose that the built-in discrimination against all industrial and commercial employees, farmers, fishermen, mill employees, miners and tradesmen be removed and that all workers be treated equally under this legislation.

In the Atlantic provinces, Canadians earn two-thirds of the national average in wages. The industrial plants and business operations are small. The area that suffers the most from unemployment, regional disparity and employment loss is not as qualified to receive benefits under this bill as are the more prosperous parts of Canada which have larger mills, larger plants, and employ larger numbers, areas where most of Canada's textile, clothing and footwear plants are situated. They also have most of Canada's Members of Parliament and cabinet ministers.

The type of industries which are the focus of this bill should be expanded to remove the discrimination against the Atlantic provinces. What about workers in provinces like New Brunswick which have resource-based economies requiring more workers at one time of the year than another, where continuity in a general trade such as lumbering is easier to prove than in a mill with a single employee?

● (1750)

The intention is to help industries adjust to competition from imported products and government induced structural changes; it should also help industries in the Atlantic provinces that must also compete with products of central Canadian industries established and protected for many years with tariff walls and government policies that deprived the Atlantic provinces of more advantageous trade with their natural trading partners in the New England States and along the Atlantic seaboard. It should help all workers who are subjected to the indignity of unemployment through no fault of their own and who must look to this bill as a safety net of last resort.

I commend the parliamentary secretary for his clear explanation of the steps leading to benefits and a description of the benefits themselves. At page 12611 of *Hansard* for November 6, 1981, he said the benefits are equal to 60 per cent of the average insurable earnings before the lay-off. For 1981, the maximum insurable earnings prescribed under the Unemployment Insurance Act stand at \$315 a week. Therefore, the maximum labour adjustment benefit is \$189 a week, he indicated. The benefits are reduced by 60 cents for each dollar of income from employment while registered under the program and one dollar for each dollar of income from other government sources or employment preceding the benefit period. That is the maximum benefit. When all these deduc-