GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

LABOUR ADJUSTMENT BENEFITS ACT

MEASURE TO ESTABLISH

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-78, to provide for the payment of benefits to laid-off employees and to amend the Canada Labour Code, as reported (with amendments) from the Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration, and Motions Nos. 1, 2, 5, 6, 7 and 8 (Mr. Kristiansen) and Motion No. 10 (Mr. Caccia).

Mr. Sid Parker (Kootenay East-Revelstoke): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak on Bill C-78. First I should like to say to the government member, who mentioned this was a humanitarian bill, that if the government brings before the House a bill which will create employment, then it could be called a humanitarian bill.

During discussions at committee stage there were representations from the Canadian Labour Congress, the United Steelworkers of America, the Canadian Trucking Association, the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, and The Railway Association of Canada. Virtually every one of them condemned the provisions of the bill. In fact, the CLC went so far as to indicate that the government is not offering medicare but a death benefit.

Bill C-78 is to provide for the payment of benefits to laid-off employees and to amend the Canada Labour Code, but I should like to add the words, "in designated areas where the government sees fit". Basically this is what the bill identifies. We in the NDP have put forward 13 amendments to the bill at committee stage and on the floor of the House; the Minister of Labour (Mr. Caccia) has put forward approximately ten. This clearly indicates that the bill was very poorly drafted and has not had the benefit of consultations with labour, management and other related groups.

The qualifications for receipt of benefits are very stringent. In order to qualify a person must first be a Canadian citizen or permanent resident; this sounds logical. Also he must have been laid off as a result of non-cyclical factors, where the total lay-off equals 10 per cent of employees or 50 employees. Can one imagine the discrimination in the bill? If it is not 10 per cent or 50 employees, some residents in that designated area could receive those kinds of benefits and yet others could not. What about those who have been employed for ten years out of the past 15 years working for 1,000 hours each year? One employee could be sick during one of those ten years and not complete his 1,000 hours of work. We in the New Democratic Party suggested an amendment that instead of 1,000 hours per year, there should be an average of 1,000 hours per year for ten years. That amendment could not be accepted because the minister and the committee chairman indicated that it was a money matter and was not something we could discuss. This is without doubt a discriminatory clause. I do not see why one of two workers working in the same industry for the same amount of time and who happened to be off work for one year

out of the ten should be disqualified. I ask hon. members whether that is humanitarian. What about exhausted unemployment insurance benefits?

• (1710)

Mr. Caccia: Would the hon. member permit a question, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Parker: Mr. Speaker, as soon as I have completed my speech, I will be prepared to answer questions.

Mr. Caccia: Read Motion 13.

Mr. Parker: What about a person having exhausted unemployment insurance benefits with no prospect of employment or one who is able to find only a low-paying job? In addition to all of these restrictions surrounding qualifications, the procedure for applying benefits seems needlessly bureaucratic.

Mr. McDermid: You want to make it more bureaucratic.

Mr. Parker: First, an application must be inspected by the Labour Adjustment Review Board. Second, if cleared, the application is then sent to the Employment and Immigration Commission, which may conduct its own investigation. Finally, a third investigation might take place if the commission deems it necessary to refer the application or any question arising to the board of referees. What a horribly complex system to impose upon Canadian workers denied the right to a job!

Mr. Siddon: Typically NDP.

Mr. Parker: I have asked the chairman of the committee and the minister how much money is going to be set aside so that these things can be carried out. I have not yet received an answer. Is the amount $10,000; $10 million; $20 million; or $30 million over the next three years? I have not been able to get that answer.

For immediate release on January 19, 1981, we found the announcement that a $350 million special industry and labour adjustment program would go into effect. In the body of that release we find the following:

> The designation of communities, for the community-based portion of the special adjustment, will be made by cabinet with the first designations within the next few weeks. Communities will be designated for one year with a maximum of two six-month extensions. It is estimated that at any point in time five or six community designations would be in place.

Since that time we have not heard of extra allotments to this program. The answer given by the minister was that times have changed and we are going to designate larger areas.

The Canadian Labour Congress, the steelworkers and various delegations put forward very clearly that communities have asked for full corporate disclosures of all information and data relevant to the decision by a company to shut down its operation. That is not too much to ask, is it? Is it too much to ask of a company that has been established for many years in a community? Is it too much to ask for a corporation or company to relay why it is shutting down and why the reasons