

Labour Adjustment Benefits

Mr. Parker: Members of the Conservative Party accepted the proposals of the government but not programs which would provide employment. It is a band-aid solution we have before us today. Hon. members on the government side of the House signed a petition urging the government to put some employment programs before this House, not band-aid programs which would provide benefits only to some people.

We did receive some answers from the trade union movement. We were told in committee that in Schefferville only about 30 of the 900 laid-off workers were eligible for benefits. Mere basic mathematics will show what a phony piece of penny-ante window dressing this bill is. Under the best of circumstances the maximum which would be available under this bill would mean that only about 3,500 workers a year would receive benefits, and there are already 500 workers covered under the old clothing, textile and shoe and tanning legislation. That is the kind of information we tried to bring forward at the committee stage. We were told there could be an additional 350 now receiving benefits on top of that. That means this bill could cover a maximum of only approximately 3,000 workers a year. Three thousand workers a day were laid off in Ontario alone in the month of December.

Mr. McDermid: Some were put into early retirement, but not all.

Mr. Parker: That is what the bill is trying to suggest: early retirement and work sharing. The bill refers to designated areas. We had a discussion about that in committee and about how the cabinet or the Ministry of Labour would designate areas. It is no wonder that when the CLC appeared before the committee studying Bill C-78 it said only that half a loaf is better than none. The CLC did not ask for this bill. The CLC said this bill would better be compared to a dry crust of bread. The Canadian Labour Congress has been given little or no opportunity to help solve the problem the minister has identified. Time after time in committee hearing after committee hearing we were told this, but no real or constructive effort put forward was accepted by the minister.

The minister even admitted in the committee that the bill would not do very much, but that is not how the bill will be advertised throughout the country. It is a limited bill and will serve only a very limited number of people.

Mr. McDermid: Agreed.

Mr. Parker: There will be discrimination because some people in some areas will be designated and others will not. When the government begins to run short of funds, certain areas will not be designated. If that is not discrimination, I do not know what is. There is serious potential here for discrimination.

Then there are the Conservatives. Why did they not bring forward any amendments? This bill was before the House for a few days. The Conservative Party is the party which agrees with the Liberals about high interest rates. It is no wonder they do not have much to say about phony programs such as this one. One of the most disgusting things about the bill is that the government tried to fob it off as being the product of

consultation. I ask the minister why the government did not consult with the labour organizations. They know the problems that face the workers and have to deal with them. When the bill was in committee we asked various witnesses if there had been such discussions. The CLC said there had not, the Canadian Manufacturers' Association said there had not and the New Brunswick labour department also said there had not. That is a very kind of consultation, Mr. Speaker.

• (1720)

A presentation made by one employer group, the Railway Association, made the point that any worker who received a pension of \$10,000 a year would probably never want to work again. Mr. Speaker, can anyone honestly claim in this age that anyone can live on \$10,000 per year? Can anyone honestly say that some of those older workers would consider giving up their regular employment and letting the workers who have been laid off take their place for \$10,000 per year? When an employee reaches the age of 54, that is when he starts paying contributions to the pension schemes in the various industries. They rely on their earnings for the last five years to determine the pension that they have worked and strived for and I do not think they are going to take a step backwards. Many will say that they have seniority and will keep on working, so the situation will not change, Mr. Speaker.

The fact is that the government does not have the will to reduce unemployment and it does not have the guts to face employees on the question of lay-offs. Our amendments have asked that not only the employees be investigated but also the employers. It is they who have a responsibility not only to employees in the community but to the community itself which will feel the effects of any lay-offs. While this patchwork legislation may help a few people, what will it do for those communities whose payroll is severely reduced? The ripple effect will be felt throughout the community, Mr. Speaker. It has become clear to many backbenchers of the Liberal Party—and to some on the front benches as well, I think—that a different approach must be taken to this kind of legislation and these programs.

I asked the Railway Association about the hours of work of its employees and I asked the truck drivers' association the same question. It seems that some truckers who drive across Canada do not have to keep a logbook now because the Department of Transport has done away with that requirement. That logbook was an important element of safety on the highway, Mr. Speaker. Drivers were required to enter the hours on the highway each day but that is not required any more. In committee we were told that some people drive as much as 260 hours per month. Surely, when there are over one million people unemployed in the country, that industry has a responsibility to pay its drivers a fair wage so that they can make a decent living by working a normal number of hours per month.

The railways are just as bad as the truckers, Mr. Speaker, because they require their employees to work 11 hours at a