

• (1720)

We have the Bill before us. It is a relief after two and a half years finally to have something that deals with older workers and with the severe problems they face when they are laid off or forced out of work at a late stage in life.

I wish I could say that the kind, nice and great sounding words in the Budget talking about human resource development in this country were really recognized in the Bill before the House. I do not think they are. I think it proves again that we are dealing with empty rhetoric. When it comes to real people in real need of our help to keep their skills fresh and to be able to participate in the workforce, it just is not there or it is there inadequately.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Steve Butland (Sault Ste. Marie): Mr. Speaker, it was perhaps divine coincidence that I went to my office about 15 minutes ago and found on my desk a news release about Phil Latulippe, a 70 year old gentleman who is going to run across Canada. One can appreciate the abilities of older people. He is 70 years of age. I wonder what the 55 to 64 year old group can do.

For a moment I would like to talk about the antithesis of older workers. I think we often look at the two extremes of society: the plight of our young and the plight of our old. I look at my community of Sault St. Marie. We have lost 2,000 young people aged 18 to 21 in the past four years. I think that plight is quite similar for the old people, except they cannot escape to another community to seek out work as readily as the young, although both situations are probably as deplorable.

On this side of the House, we have noted that only the Minister himself has decided to speak on this particular issue. We are wondering if the Government is not terribly proud of its own legislation. It makes one wonder whether we will see it on television in the form of ads to introduce it and convince us that it is good for all Canadians.

With the young, they are either too young or inexperienced. With the old, they are too old or too set in their ways, untrainable, and perhaps too experienced.

Labour

We talk about the Free Trade Agreement. We have words like "rationalization". Just yesterday, we had a new word, "reprofiling". There is also "deregularization". These words are damaging. It is resulting in closures of long established plants, laying off people who were doing specialized labour for years and years.

These people become unwanted. In fact, I suppose they almost become outcasts, in their own minds, untouchable by the new hustling, bustling industry as introduced by this Government through the Free Trade Agreement. It is exacerbated by the Free Trade Agreement, which even the Government recognized. It suggested that displacement through free trade would be a fact of life. This legislation will perhaps help to alleviate the situation, but it is much too little to address the problem truly.

We have an ageing society, but as we age, I think we are doing it more gracefully, more energetically, more exuberantly in our zest for life. Older people are not prepared to be put out to pasture but want to be an integral part of our workforce. They do not want to be treated as an afterthought. They want to continue to be a true force in society and part of the workforce.

This particular legislation makes reference to major lay-offs only. It leads one to think about what happens to the group of two, the group of five, or the group of ten lay-offs in plants. These people will suffer the very same consequence as individuals or groups of individuals of 500 strong. They will suffer the very same consequence, but apparently their concerns will not be addressed with this legislation.

It mentions the word "proportion" as a test for qualifying for this particular legislation. What would the proportion be? Two out of one hundred to qualify? Fifty per cent? I am sure it is going to be at the upper levels of percentages before these people will qualify.

Is it universal? Is it sacred trust? It certainly will not be universal. It will be as universal as Old Age Security and family allowance, but at least those are being dismantled on a piece by piece approach. This program, which should be universal, is not. At least it makes no pretence to be.

One really has to wonder about the consultation process. If one puts a figure of \$125 million up for grabs, the amount is set and then one negotiates the program