

Labour Adjustment Benefits

leery as to the intent and practices which this board and this program will follow in the allocation of priorities.

There are a number of other matters I should like to refer to that are of grave concern to us in considering the legislation before us. The program is restricted to a relatively small amount of money to be used in selective areas after the damage has been done. There is a maximum of four to six communities to be designated at one time for benefits to be paid in the total amount of approximately \$175 million, minus \$90 million which is intended for the companies themselves, leaving \$85 million for unemployed workers. If you divide that by the five years to which the total amount is supposed to apply, you end up with \$5.6 million. Divided by the six communities mentioned, this works out to approximately \$800,000 per community per year. I understand Windsor is one of the communities mentioned, and \$800,000 will not go that far in a city that is as affected as that community has been in the past year, and things do not look any rosier in times to come—not in the immediate future, in any case, though I wish they did.

The program has not been set in the context of full employment programs and massive industrial restructuring. When we look at the many serious problems facing the industries that may come within the ambit of this program—and, as I said, this does not touch the forestry industry—we begin to see the scale of the job to be done. This measure takes place in the absence of positive government economic activity.

The bill also avoids confronting the need for active labour market policies such as the levy grants system being proposed by the Canadian Labour Congress and placed before the Allmand task force and elsewhere.

The \$15 million community employment program will be of the Canada Works welfare type. When we are talking about industries in which people are quite properly getting wages and salaries in the range of \$8 to \$14 per hour, to suggest the welfare type of make-work program as a reasonable substitute for people suffering from the inaction of this government is scandalous, to say the least.

There is still no provision within the bill for accountability in respect of plant closures or lay-offs to a job protection board or any other type of agency.

The benefit levels for older workers under the labour adjustment benefits program will be lowered to bring them into line with current unemployment insurance benefits, from 66 per cent down to 60 per cent of earnings.

Again, the cabinet will designate the communities, so the decisions will be highly political. There are no specific guidelines for designation, or procedures for applications by communities that could be reviewed by some independent body. The program will affect only a few communities, maybe as few as ten over the next few years.

Also, industrial assistance may very well reward inefficiency and lack of investment, or it may be given to an industry that has already planned to invest.

● (1740)

Finally, no conditions have been established to ensure long term commitments after federal assistance is granted. Surely we have learned enough from some of the problems which have developed as a result of DREE to look again. It has even been suggested by some hon. members from the other side—maybe it is about time they started to speak up again—that steps be taken to ensure that where the government provides concrete financial assistance, there must be some type of watchdog capacity, if not equity, along with some input to ensure the continuing development and compliance of those industries. The government as well as the communities involved should have some say in return for the dollars which have been invested by the taxpayer. The taxpayers have a right to expect a return on their investment. When taxpayers invest their money in an industry, they should have representation from someone, appointed on behalf of the government, to look after the public interest. These representatives may be employees or community representatives within local governments, such as a city councillor or someone from the village or regional government, acting for the government, in order to bring back to industry some degree of social responsibility. Some social responsibility still rests with employers who at least live in the community in which they have their business, so that they are accountable to their shareholders and responsible for ensuring that people will not be cast out of the labour force unless there is absolutely no other alternative. In these days of multinational conglomerates, trans-national and even large national concerns, there is not that social responsibility which we must now begin to revive. We must have some kind of community or employee input—not necessarily control—to ensure that if those corporations must resort to dislocation, that information will be advanced to those people who are immediately affected. With that information, these people may then influence their communities, the media and the companies involved to take a more socially responsible course and to balance that social responsibility with the responsibility which these companies properly and understandably have to their shareholders.

This legislation does not begin to consider that. Although this is not the major objective of the bill, surely it is not too early—although it may be too late—to start looking in that direction. This bill should ensure that the kind of social responsibility that once existed under local ownership is revived in some areas of our economy.

Again, no conditions have been established to ensure a long term commitment after federal assistance is granted. The bill provides for no input into management in return for federal equity and in return for the federal taxpayers' dollars.

Finally, I would like to say that I am disappointed that the federal government has failed to devise a bill which provides for more understanding. I repeat that the working people of Canada are totally frustrated by the maze of regulations which now exist in the UIC system, as are their employers and representatives. I believe that this bill only adds to the maze and will make it even more difficult for people to understand.