

Labour

provisions of that program. It is not quite correct to say that only people in those industries were previously able to benefit.

Another problem with this Bill is that there is no provision for the individual older worker displaced in non-major lay-offs. There is to be a committee composed of two representatives of provincial Departments of Labour and two from the federal Department of Labour who will decide what is a major lay-off. There is no yardstick, no definition to guide them in their decision. For those of us who have had to deal over some period of time with various levels of government bureaucracy, it is a matter of some concern to see a very loose definition just left hanging for a few officials to make the actual determination.

• (1810)

The other problem with this program is that if we take the estimated average benefit for employees who will come under its terms at approximately \$10,000, the amount of funding will provide benefits to only some 5,000 workers. Given the number of dislocations, and even the Government that sold the so-called Free Trade Agreement, and admitted that there would be major dislocations in industries right across Canada, 5,000 is a drop in the bucket. The Government is placing that kind of a limit on a program which is to benefit those senior Canadians in the workforce who really have no other option but to find some other means of income other than working for wages or salaries. Many of them will come out of blue collar industries, and I am sure that many Members are aware their numbers have been declining very rapidly over the last few years.

In the Province of British Columbia alone, in the period from 1982 to approximately 1986, the membership in my own union, the IWA, dropped from some 50,000 to some 25,000 or 30,000. That kind of decline in blue collar industry is still occurring.

In that industry or in the mining and smelting industry, the nature of the work, the occupational hazards and working environment is such that, by the time the workers are 45 or 50 if they get displaced, the chances of finding another occupation are very few, especially with other companies undergoing similar kinds of reductions and rationalizations. When companies hire they want to

hire the most productive and healthy workers. If the workers have had injuries, and almost anyone who has worked in the forest industry or the mining or smelting industry for 20 or 25 years has accumulated quite a few of them, they are not in the best shape to be able to start off in a new industry or new company.

I can recall one example of a fellow that was just a few months into eligibility for the program in my hometown of Nelson. He was of Italian origin. He had only a Grade III education in Italy before coming to this country. He had put over 20 years into that particular company and into the forest industry. Even at that time in order to qualify, he had to go back to school and they wanted to teach him English. Certainly for the kind of work he had been doing he had a fairly good command of the language but only in terms of oral skills. He did not read or write English. He was going to have a great deal of difficulty. At that point in his life, having not been in a school since the third grade, to go in and start learning English just seemed like a total waste to him and the environment was entirely foreign to him. He came to me almost in tears, not only over that but for some other problems he was having because of the major cut in income. He explained that he felt like a bloody fool. This is a person who normally would be full of pride and full of vigour and certainly able to do the type of job that he had been doing but there were no more of those kinds of jobs around.

I heard at least one Member on the other side, I suppose it was the Minister, suggest that, "Well, the employment situation is much brighter now. We won't have the same kind of problems as we had during the early 1980s."

I would like to say that the unemployment picture in my own constituency of Kootenay West—Revelstoke in the period of the last four or five months has gone up in its two employment regions from either 10 per cent or 12 per cent, to 16 per cent, 17 per cent or 19 per cent. The resource recession or depression that occurred back in the early 1980s, as far as we are concerned in my part of British Columbia, is happening all over again.

We are likely to see even more of this kind of dislocation. We thought at one time we had seen the last of this at least for our working lifetime. It certainly is not a very cheering scenario for any of us.