

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

INDUSTRY—ACTION TO AVOID CLOSING OF SKIL CORPORATION PLANT, RICHMOND, B.C.—ALTERNATIVE EMPLOYMENT FOR WORKERS

Mrs. Grace MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, like the hon. member for Fraser Valley West (Mr. Rose), I raised this matter two years ago and, also like him, I raised it a very short time ago. I have no doubt that other members are interested in this plant. But when the minister says the Liberal members have been very effective in making representations to the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Pepin), I can only say that I am afraid the effectiveness of their representations is not apparent from the results. They have neither been able to prevent the plant from closing nor to bring out the facts of the matter.

According to the confidential memorandum we have been sent, the interoffice memo of 1969, the 1610 power-saw produced in Vancouver is actually a money maker and was expected to gross close to \$5 million profit in a five-year period. It was demonstrated that in a 15-month period from December, 1970, to March, 1972, the plant produced and sent out 45,000 saws, reaching its third year projected potential in only 15 months. In these circumstances the very least you could expect from the government would be confirmation or otherwise of the truth of these facts and figures so that we could find out why this firm is finding it necessary to switch its operation from Vancouver to Chicago. From the facts and figures we have seen, it is expecting a lot of these employees to ask them to believe it is really necessary for the Vancouver plant to close down.

• (2210)

I also think that the government is settling for very much less than it should if it is simply working with Manpower to try to find jobs for the employees when the plant closes down instead of making some effort between time. If the efforts of the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce two years ago in persuading the plant that it did not need to close down were successful, I cannot for the life of me understand why similar efforts are not being made at the present time. I am not saying that such is not the case; what I am saying is that we do not know the facts. Those of us who have workers in our constituencies among the 150 who will be thrown out of work on July 1 have the right to know what are the facts in this connection. For that reason I am not happy to see this veil of secrecy descend. We are given no facts. The firm has told us its story and we have to let it go at that. We believe that the government has an obligation to investigate the truth of the matter and to reveal the facts and figures so that we know the situation.

The steelworkers have done all they can, but they have been unable to get the true picture from the company. They have also ascertained that the company has not applied for government assistance of any kind. Perhaps they would not get it even if they did, but the point is they have not tried. I think that is an interesting point.

The steelworkers asked the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) himself to use his good offices to prevail upon the Canada Development Corporation to put pressure on the company to stay, but the Prime Minister's office has been

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

content to refer the steelworkers to the CDC, and as far as I have been able to learn the CDC did not reply. Nor, apparently, has the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce, to whom they also wrote. For these reasons these workers are in a very unsatisfactory situation, being asked to acquiesce in the loss of their jobs at the end of July.

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, we are all mindful of the difficulties that the closure of a plant causes its individual workers. As a result, my department, like the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce, goes to great pains to attempt to encourage the continuation of operations, as it goes to great pains to bring new plant into existence as well as new manufacturing. This does not mean that in every case these efforts are successful; there are times when the result is that the plant closes anyway. At that point in time we have other programs that attempt to ease the burden the best way we can, in terms of finding other employment and offering assistance in the relocation of employees involved.

Naturally, in the course of the conversations between the department and the plant concerned a certain amount of confidential material is discussed and examined. From the point of view of future discussions with other companies it would not be wise to treat that material in any way other than in the confidential way it is given. This approach is taken by the department and it is one which has success from time to time, as shown by the continued operation of this plant for a period.

As I say, we regret the impact of this projected closure on individual men and women who may lose their jobs, but we do attempt to offer them such services as we can in an effort to find alternatives that are suitable to them.

INDUSTRY—PULP AND PAPER—CLOSING OF MILLS—
POSITION OF DISCUSSIONS WITH INDUSTRY TO
OVERCOME PROBLEM

Mr. Jack Marshall (Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, as I have done for many months, I asked the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Pepin) to give me a progress report on April 20 dealing with the critical situation which exists in the pulp and paper industry. For some reason the pulp and paper industry is facing a critical situation not only in my own district but in every province and region. The most recent crisis occurred in western Canada at Ocean Falls.

The answer to my many questions has been that meetings are being held with the pulp and paper industry to consider tax relief and other methods of providing impetus to the industry in order that it may recover. The pulp and paper industry is probably the most important industry in Canada and the complacency which exists on the government side regarding this critical situation amazes me.

Meetings have been held since February, but every time I ask the minister for a progress report he says that meetings are continuing with the hope that they will come up with a solution. At the same time, people are being laid off across the country. But the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Marchand) is giving grants in