

Labour Adjustment Benefits

Insurance Commission for assistance. One representative pointed out that she was told not to bother, and she was over 45 years of age. In view of this, how can we treat seriously the ability of UIC to find answers? Even if Manpower was prepared to assist, what older worker with a home would be prepared to take advantage of the mobility grant? Homes are virtually unsaleable. The renting of a new home is impractical. Mobility is fine for those free to move.

● (1550)

Therefore, avenue number one; that is, Manpower finding a person a job, is a pretty remote possibility. Avenue number two is a mobility grant; that is impractical. Avenue number three, which is retraining, is just as elusive. What job retraining is there, Mr. Speaker? In St. Catharines and across Canada the task force on Employment Opportunities for the '80s reported that training programs are merely stopgap measures to get people off the unemployment rolls. The Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Axworthy) himself admitted that the courses and curriculum offered under the adult occupational training programs have become "increasingly irrelevant to the job demands in Canada". That being the case, why dangle the opportunity before these senior citizens? It is time the government became aware of the fact that we have a skilled labour crisis on our hands. The minister's speeches and press releases will be of little comfort in the next election. He will not be in this House, so we can tell him "We told you so".

The last avenue, and I will be very brief about this, Mr. Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Order, please. I think the Chair is obligated to seek the unanimous consent of other hon. members. The time for the hon. member for St. Catharines expired a few minutes ago. Would hon. members give unanimous consent so that the hon. member may conclude his speech in the next two minutes or so?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Reid (St. Catharines): I want to thank my colleagues for granting me this extension of time. A further avenue which this bill addresses is that of the portable wage subsidy. However, I want to draw to the attention of hon. members that as of December 31, 1981, only 318 job vouchers were issued and that, in the face of the great number of lay-offs with which we have confronted ourselves, is a very small number.

Step two of the bill comes after the unemployment commission has gone through the alternate avenues, which is part of its responsibility. Then the case of the unemployed senior citizen is referred to the Labour Adjustment Review Board. This board is made up of five members, all appointed by the minister. This board again investigates the lay-off of the individual and questions the qualifications and what the individual has done. Not only that, the individual must be one of 50. I sometimes question why a senior citizen should be one of 50, or 10 per cent of the work force, before he is entitled to this kind of assistance. If I am out of a job and over the age

limit, surely the benefits of this bill should be made available to me as well as to a larger group force by a bigger employer.

The significant economic adjustment must be by reason of either import competition or industrial restructuring pursuant to the provisions of the act. Import competition is clear but the act does not make clear what industrial restructuring is because the qualifier is that this must be pursuant to a policy or a program of the government. Industrial restructuring includes technological change, but how is one to discern between a technological change undertaken for strictly business purposes or that undertaken because of a government program or policy that encourages such change?

Although I have a number of complaints and questions with respect to this bill, I want to confine my concluding remarks to the flexibility to which the minister referred and which becomes necessary in the qualifications of a worker for the benefits of this bill. I have already referred to the rigidity of the 1,000 hours per year requirement. This, I anticipate, will be altered. At first glance it seems reasonable enough but there are too many other contingencies involved. The second one has to do with the length of time, namely, the ten of 15 years that one must be in the work force. The Canadian Labour Congress pointed out that the average job tenure in Canada is between seven and eight years, not ten. Some change or alteration might be made to this provision as well.

My third point is related to pensions. We still have a pension system in this country which runs the gamut from an old medieval system to a progressive one. This legislation brings out the worst in both. There is no protection to the senior citizen's pension, whether or not he has to pay into it in the future, whether he is entitled to what he has received, or indeed what pension protection he might get under the bill.

Finally, we have to recognize the limitations of Bill C-78. In committee the Minister of Labour told us that Bill C-78 was limited in scope and in application. The Canadian Manufacturers' Association told us that Bill C-78 was largely impractical. The United Steelworkers of America told us it was not adequate. There can be no question about this when the government's program over the next three years is to allocate funds up to \$10.4 million for laid-off workers. But the federal government will spend an equivalent amount in amenities and entertainment over the same period.

Mr. Lyle S. Kristiansen (Kootenay West): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I participate in the report stage of Bill C-78. Not all of my comments will be laudatory. My colleagues and myself see a number of grave failings, particularly in the first half of the bill which deals with the benefits and restrictions and to whom those very limited benefits will be paid.

First, I want to thank other members who served on the committee. I want to thank the minister for the degree of flexibility shown during the consideration of a number of amendments. Of course, we did not get anything like what we wanted, but some progress was achieved. I have been told by other colleagues of mine who have been in this place longer