

Adjournment Debate

Dominion stores through sale to A & P and the possible closing of other stores that remained in the ownership of Dominion Stores Limited. In his answer, the Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion (Mr. Stevens) indicated that the sale of those 93 Dominion stores to A & P had been approved by FIRA through a concern for the preservation of about 7,000 jobs. However, he said that he would naturally be concerned about the jobs in the remaining stores.

I appreciate the Minister's answer and I appreciate his concern, because I believe it is incumbent upon all of us in Parliament and associated with the Government to show an active, positive concern for the all too large number of Canadians who, through no fault of their own, are turned out of work as a result of reorganization of the corporate structures by which they have been employed. That has happened in the case of this impressive food chain which for so long was the leading food distribution organization in this country.

I am concerned about this matter because a large number of Dominion employees from as far away as Hamilton gathered together in Scarborough West to express their concerns about their futures in the stores that had not been sold. They had concerns about what kind of alternative employment opportunities they might be given, what kind of severance pay they might enjoy and what assistance they might receive in finding alternative employment. I recognize that these are not necessarily the legal responsibility of the federal Government, except in those areas that come directly under the jurisdiction of the federal Government. However, there is a human concern here that must weigh very heavily upon our hearts and minds.

One of the things that impressed me when looking at the annual reports of Dominion Stores Limited is that its reports have contained considerable discussion of the various arrangements that were required for the reorganization of the company and the sale of certain stores, but almost no reference at all to the human dimension of this reorganization. There was no explicit concern expressed for the well being of the persons who would be affected, in contrast to the annual reports of other major corporations which, while with comparable realism in the business world, recognize their social obligations to the people who have made those companies possible. For example, the annual report of Alcan states the following:

Any organization is only as effective as the people in it, and the Board of Directors would like to acknowledge the efforts of Alcan employees around the world in meeting the challenges of today's sometimes frustrating conditions.

I was impressed by the statement of one of the owners of Dominion Stores Limited, as quoted in the press, that the return on investment is what it's all about. Certainly all of us can see that a practical concern for the return on investment has to be on the agenda of everyone concerned with the operation of a business, small or large. However, people are part of what it is all about. One cannot build a business without people investing their lives in the well being of that organization. A great company is put together not just by financial capital, equipment and material things, but is put together by people. It is through the efforts of the people, their self-discipline and devotion that a company grows.

● (1815)

When a handful of people who control a company, and who possess the ownership of its capital, decide to close it, surely it is incumbent upon them to recognize the responsibility they have to the people who helped make it possible. It is incumbent upon us to accept the same responsibility. If it is not possible for a federal government to inject its concern directly into a transaction because of constitutional implications, surely it is possible for a federal government to take the lead in bringing together its provincial counterparts so that just procedures can be formulated in behalf of the people who find themselves threatened with unemployment, through no fault of their own.

For example, in the case of Dominion Stores Limited, some people have worked for the company for more than 20 years. They might well have expected that their seniority would have guaranteed them a place in one of the stores which A & P had purchased. However, the agreement between Dominion Stores Limited and A & P has made it essential that employment be provided only to those people already working in those stores. The people in the remaining stores now face an uncertain and anxious future. They came together and requested their Member of Parliament, their provincial member and other representatives to share with them in this concern.

I am grateful to the Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion that I was able to put this question to him. I am grateful for the concern which he expressed. I hope we will take a further step forward in showing our sense of responsibility as a Parliament and as a Government to those men and women who, through no deficiency on their part, now wonder if they will ever again have the chance to work.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Monique B. Tardif (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion): Mr. Speaker, in connection with the sale by Dominion Stores Limited of 93 of its stores located in Ontario to The Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company, Limited, the Hon. Member for Scarborough West (Mr. Stackhouse) asked what assurance the Government of Canada could give employees in other stores in Ontario that they would receive fair treatment if any more stores were sold or closed by Dominion Stores.

As the Hon. Member is aware, Dominion Stores has, in recent years, reduced and restructured its retail sales activities in the food sector. As a result, some stores have been sold, and stores that were not economically viable were closed. Many have been reopened as warehouses under the name Best for Less, while others have been converted into Mr. Grocer franchises.

Under the Foreign Investment Review Act, the Governor in Council authorized the acquisition of 93 Dominion stores by A & P on April 29, 1985. The screening of this transaction under the Act made it possible to ensure that any loss of jobs at Dominion Stores Limited would be minimized. In fact, as mentioned by the Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion (Mr. Stevens) in his letter of May 2, 1985 to the Hon.