

Excise Tax Act

jobs by October. The sad fact of this closure is that those 70 employees have nowhere to look for other employment on Cape Breton Island. What does the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Andras) suggest? He refers to the mobility program. That was the suggestion of Walter Gordon, chairman of the Royal Commission on Canada's Economic Prospects. That was the proposal for the ills of the Atlantic provinces back in 1957.

The situation has not changed very much since that time. This government gives the people of the Atlantic provinces a one-way ticket to Ontario. It suggests that they move out, leave everything and go. The sad fact is that the move is a little different now. People are coming back from Toronto, St. Catharines, Hamilton, Welland and all over Ontario. They are coming back east because they have been laid off from their jobs and have nowhere to look for employment.

What does the Minister of Finance or the government intend to do to assist these workers and their families? What does the budget or Bill C-66 hold in store for them? Just more hardship. As an indication of the degree of frustration associated with this situation, Tom Kent, president of the Cape Breton Development Corporation, failed in his efforts to assist the Canadian Motor Industries plant to continue operations on Cape Breton Island. Rather than work with Devco, the company decided to close. I am sure the budget and the attitude of this government toward business left a stronger impression in their minds regarding closure than anything Devco could offer in the way of help.

What is really alarming and is becoming more so with each passing day are the lay-offs at the Sydney Steel plant. Since March, 500 employees have been laid off. Sysco president Ernie Alderton announced a few days ago that another 300 employees would be laid off. This makes a total of approximately 800 employees thrown on the street. That is close to a quarter of the total work force, which is between 3,200 and 3,600 when the plant is running at full capacity. What does the minister or this government intend to do to assist these workers and their dependents? Obviously, the minister and the government will merely increase their problems with the additional ten cents tax on gasoline.

The sad fact of the matter is that there is no alternative employment available, and no guarantee that there will not be more lay-offs rather than a revival of development. Let the Minister of Finance show me how anything in this budget or this resolution will help those who have been laid off, or how we can anticipate anything from this tax except bad news for those who are working and for those laid off who hope and pray they will be recalled. What the people and the economy want is a policy directed at increasing employment. While we favour a two-price policy for oil, and while we know funds must be available in order to lower the price of the oil eastern Canada must import, we do not believe the funds should be raised on the backs of the working men and women, the poor and the elderly, as will be the case in respect of this tax.

All Canadians, regardless of where they live, should shoulder this burden collectively. No group or class in this nation should be singled out to carry the burden for others. If we lack energy—certainly this government lacks

[Mr. Muir.]

energy except in creating problems for the workingman—why are we not moving at greater speed to utilize the tremendous potential of the coalfields of Cape Breton? While we are working on a replacement for the Prince mine at Sydney Mines, and now that we have the Lingan mine in Glace Bay operational, there is no reason we could not move forward with two additional mines opening on Cape Breton Island. We need the coal and we need the jobs. We have the work force—and it is a good work force—to do the job. All there has to be is direction from the government to get the show on the road.

● (1520)

While we cry about the cost of energy produced from oil, we will not take action to provide alternatives that are available and could be utilized immediately. What about the new steel complex for Cape Breton Island that we have heard so much about? My Liberal opponent in the last campaign went from one end of the riding to the other promising that it was coming and that it would be located in Gabarus, a few miles from Sydney. After listening to him you would have thought it would be there almost the next day. What a transformation! Now we hear the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Jamieson) saying it might be located in Baie Comeau, Gros Cacouna, or it could be somewhere else. He is not saying it will be on the east coast. This simply means that my Liberal opponent deceived the people of Cape Breton—The Sydneys. Here we are, a year later, and it is just another broken promise by the Liberal government. This complex could be of great benefit to the economy of the island, without question, but the Liberal administration takes no action.

I remember a little over a year ago when I was accused of being against the proposed new steel plant in Cape Breton because I said the study should only take in the area where the steel had been produced since the early part of the century. Instead of that, they wanted to take in the whole eastern coast before deciding where the complex would be. With every passing day it seems to be farther and farther away from where it should be and where it is most needed. The longer we wait to take advantage of our alternatives, the more expensive it will be to undertake the construction, because of inflation and because the Minister of Finance is contributing to inflation with this budget. Unfortunately, he is deserted by his cabinet colleagues who will not defend him or his policies. It seems most unfortunate because, as I said at the beginning of my remarks, he is a pretty fine guy and at least they should make a pretence of defending him.

Mr. Stanfield: It is difficult to defend the indefensible.

Mr. Muir: Still, he is a good tennis player, a fine gentleman and a good friend to have, and it is unfortunate that he has to produce this type of budget which I do not think is of his own doing; I think he was forced to bring it before the people by a higher power—and I do not mean a higher power from the heavens.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): Wally Baker said God was on your side.