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Disabled deserve preferred credit

QMI Agency

Back when our grandparents were watching The Friendly Giant on the CBC, and learning how to pull up a rocking chair, their parents were squirrelling away Northern Telecom stock, believing it would one day secure them a comfortable retirement.

They felt their investment was safe.

It was a simpler world back then, of course, before the evolutions of the Gordon Geckos of today who believe greed is good, and the financial rapists like Canada's Earl Jones and the U.S.'s Bernie Madoff.

Then the world got digital and complex, and the pillage really began.

Northern Telecom became Nortel and, when the bubble burst in the dot.com fantasyland, Nortel went from one dumper to another but not before mismanagers of the company filled pockets with outrageous CEO buyouts and executive bonuses while their employees filled the unemployment line and stockholders were left with nothing but useless paper.

So we have no sympathy for Nortel or its execs.

Not a lick.

Right now, more than a million Canadians are counting on disability insurance plans that don't guarantee benefits if their employer goes bankrupt.

And this includes 39 Nortel employees who, come year's end, will be in a pool with other creditors fighting for a small percentage of the company's assets once it is legally bankrupt. And this is wrong.

Bad enough that Nortel's managerial ineptness took its shareholders for a ride, but now it wants to kick its weakest and most vulnerable to the curb.

And with a court's permission, no less.

While we do not often trumpet the Liberals, we finally get a chance to say something positive about former Toronto mayor and Liberal cabinet minister Art Eggleton as he attempts to push through a bill that would re-classify all workers on long-term disabilities as "preferred" creditors, rather than "unsecured" thus putting their claims second in line for the remains of a company.

It's a bill an amendment to the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, and the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act that is long overdue.

Trust us, we have no trouble kicking people when they're down, as long as they deserve to be down. But we draw a line at the long-term disabled.

Right across this country.

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