

*Employment Support Bill*

would not be passing it as quickly as I hope we will. The fact is that we are faced with a situation that must be met.

I support 100 per cent the fear expressed by the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) that the power given this government in this bill can go on and on for years into the future, to other governments and other ministers, thus increasing the stranglehold that government in general is gaining over Parliament. The benefit of this motion is that it makes sure this temporary bill, to meet an immediate situation, does not become a permanent tool of the government, free of Parliament, to direct, alter and control international trade policies and tariffs to the benefit of certain elements of Canadian production. At this time under these circumstances we know why the bill is being passed, and we know in whose favour it runs. This is not a general support bill as the minister has stated, otherwise the government would have accepted motions Nos. 1 and 2 on the order paper, or it would have made provision in the bill to cover the situations to which they were directed. If it were intended to be a general bill benefiting Canadians who export, this would have been the case.

• (4:30 p.m.)

That is not what this bill is. It is directed toward a certain sector of the Canadian economy. While it meets an immediate situation, it could most certainly be used in the future to redirect the whole system of foreign trade and tariffs which has been set up over many years of negotiation. I do not think anyone should object to Parliament being insistent in this case about looking into other situations at different times in the future.

From where will the next threat to Canadian industry arise? Will the next threat come from the European economic community? If it does would we in this House accept, without any debate or discussion, a government move to deal with that situation by way of order in council, without any reference to Parliament and without any need for discussion? That is an entirely different situation from the one we are discussing today. It is in fact in the nature of more than a blank cheque to pay money, it is a blanket authorization to alter trade patterns with the whole world. There could be some secret orders in council under this bill which would be very difficult to locate. Undoubtedly they would come to light as they began to be employed, but by that time Parliament would be met with a fait accompli and, in fact, would be powerless to change the situation.

At this time, with the proposed orders in council and regulations which have been outlined to us, the bill is not only acceptable, it is urgent. The minister has advised the country of the direction of this bill and the direction of current orders in council and regulations. We know what we are talking about if we pass the bill today and when we contemplate immediate orders in council. In that regard, it is urgent.

Let me refer particularly to the forest products industry where some relief is essential to maintaining employment in many of these plants. Forest products plants operate in large part on very narrow margins, relying on volume to maintain operation, staff and employment, as well as the provision of foreign dollars for Canada. These plants have just recovered from a terrible set-back as a result of

[Mr. Aiken.]

the value of the dollar rising in relation to the U.S. dollar. A year ago our manufacturers who export had an advantage of roughly 7 per cent when the exports were paid for in U.S. funds.

Within the last few months this rate has hovered around one and one half per cent, and today I am told that the exchange rate is less than one-half of one per cent. This involves a range of 7 per cent, which is more than the margin of profit in many forest products manufacturing industries. In one way or another, by laying people off, by cutting profits and by short-cutting systems, the manufacturers have managed to meet the immediate situation and stay alive. Now, they are being met with another difficult situation. In many cases they are faced with further tariffs of from 8 per cent to 10 per cent. This bill is essential to those who have survived in order that they may continue to make deals with United States buyers, maintain employment in their plants and draw U.S. currency to assist in maintaining our balance of payments. This is a very necessary objective.

In this situation, and with the knowledge that several plants in my region are struggling to maintain themselves in business, keep their staffs going and their workers employed, I am glad this bill is before us and I am prepared to see it approved quickly. But we are faced with this long-range problem referred to in the motion. I think in all honesty the minister should consider this motion and accept it. I see nothing wrong with it. It is not limiting the government's authority or power at this moment, and it certainly does not limit further orders in council. It does permit Parliament to consider and debate a new situation. The only reason for refusing this would be that the government rejects the efforts of Parliament when it attempts to keep control in some way over the type of order in council which could alter our trade pattern and tariff relations with other countries.

I should think the minister would welcome this motion. He has not said yet that he does not, but I hope he will consider it seriously. I would feel very much better about the bill if I knew we were not sacrificing a principle in our anxiety to help those people who have been so severely damaged by a series of events over the past year or two.

• (4:40 p.m.)

In conclusion, I wish to say that under the present government Canada has adopted a very wobbly attitude in its relationship with the United States, in its attitude toward Canadian manufacturers, in its attitude in respect of United States capital coming into Canada and in its political attitude toward the United States. I think the people of the United States and the United States President particularly must have some real doubt about where our government is leading us. We in this House have great doubt about what our relations are with other countries in so many matters. In this particular situation, I rather expect the United States government must be saying to itself that it cannot see any reason on earth to give Canadians a break because our government has indicated no sympathy for what they are doing in the world. Therefore, I believe we must ask ourselves where we are going, not only in respect of the United States but in respect of various other countries of the world who are left with great uncertainty on where this country stands in its