

Export Development Act

Nos. 6 and 8, seek to keep the Export Development Corporation on a responsible track.

Bill C-110 proposes to increase the limits of a discretionary section of the Act from \$3.5 billion to \$10 billion. Under this section, the Cabinet may overrule or override a decision which the board of directors of the EDC has judged not to be in the best interests of the corporation. Not a good deal for the corporation is defined in the Act as one that "would, if entered into or issued, impose upon the Corporation a liability for a term or in an amount in excess of that which the Corporation would normally undertake." Should the corporation make the decision, the Cabinet may yet decide, good deal or not, whether it chooses to approve the transaction, and it is free to do so under these provisions of the Bill. It can overrule the board of directors which it has set up. Needless to say, if the transaction proves to be a dead loss, the taxpayers are obliged to make up that loss, or the deficit.

We believe that \$3.5 billion, even with today's money, is ample. Should it not be sufficient, the Government owes it to the taxpayers of Canada to come before Parliament to ask for more. There is no indication, however, that \$3.5 billion is an inadequate total at present. Less than half this amount has now been used. Why the unseemly scramble for an almost threefold increase? Does the Government have more Algerian monuments in mind, or are we to become a corporation of speculators, par excellence, a superman?

The motions before us simply wish to give the Members of this House an opportunity of review, and nothing is more fair than that. The Minister has tried to downgrade this debate, as has the Parliamentary Secretary, by attacking the Opposition for not caring about trade. Of course we care about trade. Of course we are concerned with our export business, and sometimes the deficit. However, this debate is not about trade. It could have and would have taken place over any other piece of legislation seeking to remove a Crown corporation a little further from the responsibility of Parliament.

I would be rather derelict in my duties and responsibilities to my constituents, as would any Member of this House, if I did not stand in my place and make every effort to protect their hard-earned dollars. Canadians have seen from experience what happens when Parliament's control over the purse-string is weakened. Deficits and red ink financial statements are now the order of the day. It is time that stopped. We on this side have proposed amendments to put a halt to this continuing erosion of our dollar. It now behooves the Government to demonstrate that it too has respect for the taxpayers' dollar by accepting these amendments. I urge the Government, in this last minute of my time, to do so.

Mr. Bruce Halliday (Oxford): Mr. Speaker, at this stage in a debate it is sometimes difficult to bring a lot of new information before the House. However, when a Government is determined to resist change and resist improvements to a Bill as much as this Government, it is sometimes necessary to emphasize the points you want to make.

The amendments we are dealing with, Nos. 3 and 5 put forward by the Conservative Party, deal with the authorization for capital borrowing of the Export Development Corporation. A couple of main issues spring to my mind when we think of the Export Development Corporation. One is, as other Members have suggested, trade. Some Government Members try to make it appear that we on this side are opposed to trade. If one examines some of the facts as to what has happened with regard to trade during the last 15 years that this Government has been in power, one finds some very interesting figures staring one in the face.

At present about 30 per cent of our Gross National Product is derived from trade. We appreciate that. Others have indicated the importance of that.

Mr. Blais: Talk about the trade surplus.

Mr. Halliday: The Minister talks about the trade surplus raw materials and grain products and does not mention the surplus in manufactured goods, which is way down. In 1968, the share of world trade that Canada enjoyed at that time was 5.74 per cent. In 1981, 13 years later, it was down to 3.8 per cent, close to a 50 per cent drop in the proportion of world trade that this country enjoys. That is no credit to the present Government. It indicates its lack of concern about the trade this country should be enjoying.

The Canadian Manufacturers' Association looked at this problem from a different point of view. It indicated that if we were to regain our share of world trade to the extent we had in 1970, just 11 years ago, we would create 2.7 million jobs. That is the number of jobs that would have been created during the past 15 years if the Government had had a true concern about trade and not just trade in raw materials and other products which do not produce many jobs, like the manufacturing sector does.

We might ask ourselves why we have had this poor trade performance. A few moments ago we heard from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Science and Technology (Mr. Peterson). He tried to justify the present status of trade that he believes we are enjoying. He failed to acknowledge that the significant drop from 5.7 per cent to 3.8 per cent is probably because we have suffered from a lack of productivity in this country over the last number of years under this Government. We may ask why we have suffered from a lack of productivity. It probably boils down to one most significant point, which is the fact that the present Government, although it is trying to recoup its position now, has, over the years, failed to recognize the need for spending money on research and development in science and technology.

● (1640)

I well remember that when I first came to the House about nine years ago, the then Minister responsible for science and technology was trying to tell Canadians that we did not need to spend money on research in science and technology, that all we needed to do was to buy the research from the United States or from some western European country. The attitude