

Employment Support Bill

such action by other countries. Hon. members should view the legislation in that light, and in that light only.

During the course of our debate, both in the committee and in the House, from time to time a question was raised on the possibility of countervailing action being taken by the United States against exports from Canada that might benefit from this measure. In the standing committee the minister stated that, in theory, any form of government assistance, direct or indirect, visible or invisible, given to exports could attract some kind of U.S. countervailing action.

In the past U.S. actions along this line have not been very consistent, and so it is difficult to ascertain what the U.S. might do in this instance. There have been instances where the United States applied countervailing measures against some countries, and totally ignored the possibility of applying them against other countries. A long time ago they used countervailing action against countries which sold them raw materials at prices which the Americans thought were too high. Presumably they might again use countervailing action in that way, but the most interesting use of countervailing action by the Americans has been in instances where other countries applied import surcharges against their products. I am sure in applying countervail, the United States will be cognizant of action that they themselves have taken in the past.

In the context of the employment support program we believe, and sincerely believe, that United States countervailing action would not be warranted. The whole purpose of this bill is to avoid serious employment dislocation in Canada. It is not an export subsidy. There is no obligation on the part of a company receiving assistance to maintain any export level. The assistance provided by this program is provided mainly to tide over affected companies until the surtax is removed or until such time as they can make adjustments which may be necessary in their products. A company is free to do so by developing new product lines, introducing new products, developing new markets or in fact anything other than production as long as it maintains an agreed level of employment. That is the key factor, an agreed level of employment. The program will not give Canadian firms an unfair competitive advantage in export markets. May I remind hon. members that assistance will be given only to the extent needed to maintain employment levels; no more and no less.

The assistance under the program will be available to firms of all sizes. This point was discussed in committee and I want to make that clear, assistance will be available to firms of all sizes, large or small. The point that is important is the degree of unemployment in a particular plant. The program makes no distinction based on the size of the applicant and, of course, assistance will be provided on a plant basis.

During the course of debate yesterday an amendment was proposed by the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) and I should like to refer to an argument raised by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) in that regard. The hon. member said that it would be possible to debate the matter, that is a new set of regulations, if the matter were deemed important enough. What is an important matter, Mr. Speaker? I submit to you that what is important to one member of this House may not be the least bit important to the majority of other

[Mr. Howard (Okanagan Boundary).]

members. If a price support program were announced for the apple growers of Okanagan Boundary riding, I would think it the most important program to come before this House and if the amendment suggested was passed, I would believe that to be such an important item that it would have to be referred to the House. To another member from Alberta or Saskatchewan, if the National Energy Board were to decide to change the regulations to include a new pipeline across Canada, that would be of undoubted importance and those members would want to refer it to the House.

There are many other examples of this type of situation and we could end up by referring every matter to the House of Commons, spending day after day, seven hours of debate after seven hours of debate after seven hours of debate—we would never come to the end, in order to deal with the matters that some member of this House considered of vital importance.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I should like to mention that the government intends to put this program into operation just as soon as it can be approved so that assistance can be provided immediately to the companies and the employees needing it. We want to forestall the possibility of employment disruption and we want to do that as quickly as possible. I should like to thank hon. members on both sides of the House and in committee for their assistance in processing this bill so quickly. I think all members have recognized the importance of it and we have had a great deal of co-operation.

Before resuming my seat, Mr. Speaker, I should like to add one point concerning the debate yesterday. We had some discussion at one point and a little confusion on the motion of the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent) concerning the possibility of changes in the reporting procedure contained in clause 21 of the bill. While we did not succeed in coming to an agreement on changes in the reporting procedure that would satisfy the hon. member and his party, the minister has agreed, and I can assure the House on his behalf, that he is prepared to submit quarterly reports to the House rather than annual reports. If this will make it possible to give hon. members on the other side more access to information, we are prepared to accommodate them. We say quarterly because we feel this would be more practical than monthly and would be often enough to overcome the difficulties discussed in yesterday's debate. The minister is also prepared to provide additional information if it can be done without infringing upon the private business interests of the firms concerned in the program.

I wish to thank hon. members for their assistance in the speedy passage of this important legislation to which business and labour in Canada are looking forward eagerly.

Mr. H. W. Danforth (Kent-Essex): Mr. Speaker, I should like to speak on third reading of this measure to indicate is that I intend to support it but that I am rather reluctant and uneasy in doing so. In the next few moments, I should like to point out some of my doubts in the hope that when the regulations are drawn up it may yet be possible for the government to make provisions that will help many individual companies which I feel cannot qualify under the provisions outlined to us in this measure and before the committee.