

Employment Support Bill

Mr. Pepin: May I ask a question? Would the hon. member give us the figures of the rise in price of these fish in the last year or two?

Mr. Lundrigan: What a lot of absolute hogwash! Is the minister trying to say that because there has been a firming-up in the American market which enables a fisherman to get a little more for his product, we should trade away that little profit?

Mr. Pepin: No, Mr. Speaker. I was just trying to get the hon. member to give a full picture of the situation and not a partial one.

Mr. Lundrigan: There is no doubt at all in my mind that in the last few years, because of the great depletion of stocks off our shores there has been an increase in demand and a consequent increase in the price paid on the American market. This just means that fishermen are now able to buy bread twice a week. Does the minister want us to go back to the starvation level?

Let me try to translate into real terms for the minister some of the impact of the American surcharge. The Canadian fishing industry will lose \$3 million to \$3½ million. In cod blocks alone there is an increase of about 1 cent per pound resulting in \$600,000 lost to the industry; in flounder blocks an increase of 2.5 cents per pound will result in a loss of \$122,000; various types of flatfish, chilled, frozen or semi-frozen will show a loss of \$1½ million; herring, prepared or preserved, \$120,000. The Canadian fishing industry cannot tolerate a loss of \$3½ million in revenue at the present time.

The Canadian government claims that it cannot give these industries any assistance, for several reasons. One is that it will be passed on to the American consumer. But Mr. Speaker, most of the American chain stores have refused to increase the price of that product on the shelf to the consumer, so the result is that it will revert to the primary producer, the fisherman. The program designed to help Canadian secondary manufacturing industry states that unless an industry can show a loss of employment it will not qualify for benefits. The fishing industry cannot show a loss of employment, Mr. Speaker; it can only show a very substantial reduction in revenue to the fisherman. As a matter of fact, if initially the American market can pick up the small percentage difference in price in a few weeks or months, what would have been a small increase in cost to the American consumer will go back to the producer and the fishermen of Canada will lose as a result.

The whole program of aid must be reconsidered in a more sophisticated fashion so that help can be offered either through export subsidies or compensation to producers. Some way must be found to offset the loss in revenue to the agriculturalists, the forestry people and the fishermen. This government must make a deliberate effort to ensure that the Canadian dollar does not go above par with the American dollar, as is anticipated and hoped by many European countries. If this should happen and we lose another four or five cents per pound on these exports, we are in danger of losing a major national industry.

I should like to change the subject for a few moments, Mr. Speaker, and refer to a point that has been touched on before, that is, the present isolationist attitude of the United States. In Canada we are in real danger of being sidetracked into believing that there is no unemployment in this country except that which will be created by the American move, that there was no unemployment last year and that the only problem facing Canada at the moment is the impact of the 10 per cent surcharge and the future impact of their DISC program. I am not forgetful that during the spring of 1971, according to Statistics Canada three-quarters of a million people were out of work in this country.

I do not forget that there were breadlines in Vancouver last spring and that unrest there caused great concern to the local officials. I do not forget the excursions of the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) into Toronto and other urban centres to see the unrest, the absolute dismay and despair of people without work and without welfare because municipalities were not able to foot the bill of welfare programs. I do not forget that. That happened without any aid from the United States. This winter we will have one of the most serious unemployment problems since Canada reached nationhood. In this House, Mr. Speaker, do not let us be sidetracked into thinking that an \$80 million program will solve the economic problems of this nation.

I hate to say this about the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce because I have a great deal of admiration for him, but I must say that because of the official stance of the office of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and this person, whatever his name is, this fellow who rides roughshod over the deputy minister and whips everybody into shape—he is in the Prime Minister's office—I think several members of the cabinet are secretly happy that they now have the political whipping-boy they have been seeking for some time. They believe they can now say that all the problems in Canada are being caused by the actions of the U.S. government. Let no Canadian be fooled by that attitude. This is a neat little political situation for the Prime Minister and his cabinet cohorts. We demand a major statement on the government's position regarding the domestic unemployment which has been created by overstating the case on inflation and by economic policies which have backfired during the last few years.

• (3:20 p.m.)

Earlier today I directed a question to the Acting Prime Minister (Mr. Sharp) who always shows fine skill in soft-peddalling his way through the question period—he can talk for a month and say absolutely nothing—asking whether the government had any major strategies to fight the unemployment problems facing the nation. He came out with his usual boneless, worthless, generalized comment. I find it little wonder that young Canadians who observe the political processes of our country become disillusioned with our political institutions when they listen to the statements of people like the Secretary of State for External Affairs who on infrequent occasions is our Acting Prime Minister.