

Employment Support Bill

terribly important; the important thing is that these ideas are aired and, furthermore, that the public itself becomes involved in the debate, which in turn means there is feedback both to Parliament and to the government.

• (4:20 p.m.)

On the whole, the more we can do to ensure that government action is subject to political scrutiny and to make the government responsible to Parliament, the better off this country will be and the wiser will be the decisions emanating from this House. For a long time there was great concern that what was wrong in Canada was that we had a succession of minority governments; that all we had to do was to provide the Liberal party with a majority government and all would be well. The minority governments were pretty hair raising. I was here during the term of office of two of them and it was not easy for the government to govern; there was much criticism of it. But looking back on it now, those minority governments were infinitely better, more responsible and more productive than the majority government that sits on the government benches today. Therefore, I think the motion before the House is a good one. I am prepared to support it and I hope all hon. members will do likewise.

Mr. Norman A. Cafik (Ontario): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the specific motion put before the house by the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert), may I say I was present in the committee while this matter was being discussed. Although the hon. member has made an adjustment in the motion he has presented to the House today by recognizing that once in a while this House is not sitting and has offered a provision whereby under such circumstances this matter can be dealt with, I personally will not support the motion for a number of reasons.

The first reason is this. The argument put forward is that the opposition, indeed perhaps the whole House, would like to have an opportunity to discuss the content of the regulations before they are in fact implemented when the House is sitting and, in a case where the House is not sitting, at least to discuss them after the event. I suggest that any Member of this House has an opportunity to do this under the present rules. For example, when an order in council is made and tabled, the opposition in particular is quite free to use one of its many allotted days for the purpose of discussing it. If that is so, and if the opposition feels strongly about it, it can move a motion of non-confidence which may result in the end not only of the regulation but of the whole government.

If we were to allow this sort of motion, every regulation that is passed would have to be discussed in this chamber for seven hours, and I think we would be doing nothing else but debating such matters. We all know how urgent many of our problems are today. This Bill C-262 is designed to deal with an urgent situation brought on by the surcharge applied against goods entering the United States. I am sure that in a rapidly moving society like ours, this kind of thing may well happen again. Therefore, I think we should empower the government to deal with these matters effectively and speedily.

Frankly, I see no reason to bring the regulations themselves before the House in this specific way. We do have the bill before the House, but we do not have the regula-

tions. We are presently considering the bill with a view to passing it. Why would we do so if we felt we needed the regulations first?

The purpose of this bill is spelled out, the reasons for it, as are the general provisions for handling given situations. I suggest that we follow the pattern of the past and allow these regulations to be put forward by order in council. Then, if members of the House wish to debate them, they are perfectly entitled to do so under a motion of non-confidence on an opposition day. This gives them and the rest of the Members of the House ample opportunity to discuss the pros and cons of the regulations which may well come forward if some other penalty is placed upon our exports by any other country in the world.

I also think that one of the virtues of this legislation is that it is not directed solely and entirely toward imposition of the U.S. surcharge. I do not think there is any doubt that the surcharge has given rise to it; I do not think that anyone denies that. But the legislation itself is designed to deal with this or any other kind of situation of similar nature brought upon our economy by any other country. If we were to pass this motion we would be saying that the bill is designed really only to deal with the U.S. surcharge, and I do not think that this is the bill's purpose. I want to speak to some other points later on third reading, but at the moment I wanted to express my reservations in connection with the motion before the House and to indicate that I will not support it.

Mr. G. H. Aiken (Parry Sound-Muskoka): Mr. Speaker, I should just like to say a word in reply to the comments of the hon. member for Ontario (Mr. Cafik) in order to make a debate of this in some sense. The hon. member stated in his reasons for opposing this motion that he did not see why Parliament should be asked to pass upon every regulation which the government brought in by order in council. Although I would agree with him on that point, this is not an ordinary order in council. Neither is the bill an ordinary bill. This is a bill which can alter and affect international trading patterns. Our trading relations with other countries can be changed by straight order in council and without the direction of Parliament. It bypasses all the established practices and procedures that have been built up over the years regarding tariffs and trade with other countries. In general it is out of spirit with the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade; it is out of spirit with world-wide trading patterns.

The hon. member stated that we were not here dealing just with the United States surtax on manufactured goods. I would argue that point with him. I say we are, that that is the only reason the bill is before us at the present time. Such a bill would not be before us if we were not confronted with the situation that has been created by the United States.

Mr. Pepin: That is one occasion.

Mr. Aiken: The minister says that this is one occasion. I do not want to engage in polemics with him; I do not back down from what I have said, namely that if we were not faced with the imposition of the 10 per cent United States surcharge we would not have this bill before us, and we