

Employment Support Bill

tions and I would have to qualify to no end everything that I would say in answering.

• (4:10 p.m.)

That gives the reasoning. If the government is going to take action on this bill, it has to pass an order in council, and that order in council must come before this House for an affirmative resolution when Parliament is sitting and, for confirmation when Parliament is not sitting. What kind of action? The minister does not know. Yet we are asked to give the government a blank cheque for 20 years to do something the government has not yet determined and, according to the bill, whatever decision is made does not have to come before this House. As for the Statutory Instruments Committee, it would meet only long after the event with limited powers of review; the government would not need to explain its action one iota. But that is the type of administration we are getting, and this is why I say that Parliament should have power to review—not as in Bill C-207, where the confirmation or the affirmative resolution is limited to the House of Commons—I think that was a terrible affront to the other House.

It is Parliament—and until the constitution of this country is changed the other House forms an integral part of Parliament—that approves something that is happening; it is not a law of the House of Commons, it is law of parliament, notwithstanding that some hon. members have inflated egos as to the relative importance of this chamber and believe that only the temporary majority as expressed by their presence here need confirm the acts of government. The constitution of this country says "Parliament". Parliament means the Senate, the House of Commons and the Crown. There has to be the consent of the Senate in matters of this kind. We are not a uni-cameral Parliament but unfortunately Bill C-207 was written in that way. So I have proposed that change.

I think my amendment is an improvement of the bill. From the viewpoint of Parliament and of this House of Commons it is certainly an improvement, because I defy any hon. member to tell me that he is in the habit of delving into orders in council. As a matter of fact, 95 per cent of the members of this House would not even know where to go for orders in council, or whether they can get copies. Most of them do not even get the *Canada Gazette* or, if they do, their copies go into the waste basket. This is why I say that in matters of this kind decisions of the government or recommendations or proposals of the government must come back to Parliament. Debate would not be expensive, but the government would be able to state its case and if there were to be opposition or criticism, that case could be stated. I hope members of this House will be so convinced that they will accept this amendment.

Mr. Max Saltzman (Waterloo): I should like to support the amendment of the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert). I think it is a very good amendment, particularly in the light of the experience we have had recently regarding economic policy in Canada. The happy assumption, perhaps the happy, incompetent, assumption that the people in Canada once had that all was well because the Liberals were in power has been badly shaken over the last number of years when they displayed an incomparable incompetence. The people could no

[Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West).]

longer go on the basis that they could leave it to the Liberals, because they know what they are doing, since obviously they do not. This bill is about as good an illustration of how little they know about what is going on as any. It is an additional proof. With that kind of situation facing us I think it would be extremely dangerous for us to give this government, perhaps any government, the power to amend by order in council, to change the rules as they go along.

I say this with the greatest of seriousness. It is time we became somewhat more political about economic matters in Canada. I am sure that the argument the minister, or any other ministers of the Crown will raise, is that these matters arise very quickly and there must be freedom to act quickly in the best interests of the country. He would say they have been given a mandate by the electors and that therefore they have the power to behave in that particular way and that if this House were to accept the motion of the hon. member for Edmonton West many of those changes, many of those regulations would become political and subject to debate. I think that is exactly what should happen. The hon. member for Edmonton West has put in a seven-hour debate feature which means that debate would be limited. I think this is a worthwhile part of the motion and should satisfy some of the objections of the government that the debate might get too prolonged. I would say this is one motion which should meet with the approval of hon. members of this House.

I was interested in a remark made by the previous speaker when he paraphrased the minister who said that the purpose of the bill was to enable the government to react promptly. There is almost no evidence that this government has reacted promptly to crises in Canada, including the ones they have brought on themselves. For instance, we have had serious unemployment in this country for two years now. Where is the prompt reaction of the government? All we keep getting are assurances from the other side of the House that the situation is getting better, that the indices would start improving, only to be met with a new set of excuses when their promises do not materialize. Therefore, I think the change the hon. member seeks to make would have the additional effect of assuring that the government reacted promptly. After all, the party in power already has full power to act; certainly, they have all the power they need to do something about unemployment; they have all the power they need to do something about the United States surtax, to change the direction of our trade policy, yet despite the possession of all this power they have done very little about it.

The other question is that although they can take action and sometimes on the odd occasion they do act, there is little evidence to indicate they have done so in particularly wise fashion. Therefore, there is great advantage in ensuring that the action they are contemplating does come before the House for open discussion. It may be that debate sheds light on the subject under discussion. It may be there are occasions when the opposition does not materially assist in developing ideas. On the other hand, there are many occasions—I think most occasions—when the opposition performs a very useful role in the sense that it brings ideas before the government. Whether the government accedes to those ideas at that moment or retreats to its little recesses to think about them is not