

Export and Import Permits Act

this kind. I feel the time has arrived, indeed the time is overdue, when there ought to be that reference to a committee for serious study and consideration. I put that before the government, and I urge that after second reading the bill should go to the standing committee on banking and commerce.

In conclusion, sir, may I remind the house that this legislation has always been recognized by the government as of an emergent nature which can be supported only for a limited duration. The limited duration which is now expiring is three years. The government is asking for an extension for a further three-year period. I would say that unless the government is prepared to have this bill go to the committee on banking and commerce, serious consideration should be given to making it a shorter period; because I think there is every reason to expect that if the committee on banking and commerce had the opportunity to conduct a thorough review of the administration of the act and the existing controls it might be found that the wide powers now conferred by the act upon the governor in council and upon the Minister of Trade and Commerce could be reduced without the loss of anything that is vital to meet the needs of current conditions or conditions that are foreseeable within the near future.

The list of export materials that have been classified as strategic materials has been revised from time to time. It is likely to undergo further revisions. The last one was carried out just two months ago.

So far, then, as the principle of the bill is concerned, sir, one can give it a limited sort of approval. At the same time I urge that because of the nature of this legislation the government ought to agree willingly to send this bill to the banking and commerce committee after second reading, in order that the scheme of the act and the administration of the controls under that act could be very carefully weighed and reviewed.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I am sure all members of the house will agree that there is a continuing need for legislation of the kind contained in the Export and Import Permits Act. Indeed I note with interest that despite the criticisms the hon. member for Eglinton offered in the course of his remarks, even he is not unwilling to vote for the second reading of this bill which provides for the continuation of the Export and Import Permits Act for a period of another three years.

I think we are all pleased that the government across the way has learned a few lessons during the course of this parliament.

It is not so long ago that there was another bill more or less in this same field. I refer to the Defence Production Act, the continuation of which was sought by the Minister of Defence Production, who is the same minister responsible for this bill, only in that instance the continuation was sought on a permanent basis. We all remember the battle that took place over that matter in the session of 1955, as a result of which the government's bill was amended to provide for the continuation of that legislation only for a further three years. It would look as though a lesson was learned at that time; for the proposal now before the house is that this legislation, which is in a sense a companion piece to the Defence Production Act, is to be continued not on a permanent basis but just for another three years.

We all agree that the world situation is still such that there does have to be control over exports; and even though the previous speaker may not agree with us, we think the economic situation is such that there does have to be some control over both exports and imports. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, we feel that in principle we must agree with the request to have this legislation continued for a further period of time. However, we think there is validity in the suggestion made by the hon. member for Eglinton that this bill might be referred to a standing committee such as the committee on banking and commerce.

One of the difficulties that always confronts us in dealing with a piece of legislation of this kind is that the form in which it is set up does not present an opportunity to discuss in detail what is actually being done. The bill is a very simple one of just one section. When second reading is carried and we go into committee on the bill we shall then have only that one section to discuss, which in turn provides for an amendment to but one section of the existing statute. Nevertheless, though that is all the amending bill does, in effect it continues in existence for another three years a statute consisting of some 29 sections. Not only is it impossible to discuss those 29 sections when we are on second reading, as we are now, when we must deal with the principle of the bill, but it is likewise very difficult in committee of the whole, on a one-clause bill, to discuss those 29 sections which in effect are to be continued for another three years. Everyone knows that it is much easier to have a discussion on all that is involved in those 29 sections if the bill is referred to the banking and commerce committee.

As I say, Mr. Speaker, it is our view, generally speaking, that this type of legislation is necessary under present conditions.