

Export Development Act

incapable of taking a long-term look at the future of this country. While that might be the pattern of what this government has done, we in this parliament have a much larger responsibility. The government might be interested in surviving only the next six months, but the Parliament of Canada has to be interested in the country's being able to survive and be strong for a much longer period of time.

As in the case of many agencies of the federal government, we need a full scale, thorough, and calm review of all the activities of the Export Development Corporation. We need to have the opportunity, in an atmosphere of calm, and without any unusual pressures, to sort out the gains for Canada from the losses for Canada and to ensure that Canadian public policy is designed exclusively to create opportunities for this nation and is not designed, as is unfortunately the case with some of the loans and activities of EDC, to have the consequence of creating new problems for this country. We cannot get that kind of examination of the bill now for a variety of reasons, some of which I intend to go into, but I make the point in passing that an examination of EDC should be one of the very early activities that is undertaken by this parliament once we have introduced into practice here the concept of the sunset law, the concept of an automatic review of the effectiveness of federal agencies. That is a commitment that my colleagues and I intend to introduce early after the next election—

● (1522)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark:—so that we and the Canadian taxpayers can be sure that there will be an opportunity to review, coldly and carefully, the effectiveness of agencies which are now in place.

Mr. Pinard: You are dreaming.

Mr. Clark: My colleague opposite says I am dreaming. I presume he means I am dreaming in thinking that there might be an election. I say to him that his party can only run so far. Your Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) is running away from the election now, but he has to call one within a year from July. You might have a year left if you demonstrate more reluctance to face the electorate than you have in the past few weeks. But your time will come, and the people of Canada will have an opportunity to have a government that will introduce sunset legislation and other legislation that will review and curtail the activities of agencies which are not serving the public interest in Canada now.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Abbott: May I put a question to the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark)?

Mr. Clark: Please go ahead.

Mr. Abbott: I want to be clear whether he is suggesting he would introduce a sunset provision to bring the sun down on the EDC.

[Mr. Clark.]

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clark: What I am suggesting to the minister, Mr. Speaker, is that I think it is past the time when individual members of the House of Commons had the opportunity to have some real impact upon controlling the activities and the expenditure of the Government of Canada. That is the tradition of parliament; that is why we are here. It is a tradition which has been broken by the government of which the minister is a part, and it is a tradition which we intend to reintroduce. One of the means by which we intend to introduce it is by bringing into practice a sunset law which would ensure that a committee of this parliament will have the opportunity to examine in detail whether agencies and operations, such as EDC, are in fact carrying out their mandate. They will be subject to detailed examination. If it is found that they are not carrying out their mandate, then they will go out of business. If it is found that their mandate is inappropriate, then their mandate will be changed. I am sure the minister will agree that that would be a very helpful innovation in the House, and I am sure he will also agree that it will only occur with a change of government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: Our problem right now is that this government has manufactured a crisis, which means that we cannot give EDC the kind of searching analysis that is required now because there are certain immediate and legitimate pressures upon the government. In short, the problem is that EDC has already reached, or has very nearly reached, the lending limits which have been authorized by the House, and exports of Canadian goods will be lost if the House does not move fairly quickly to pass this bill raising the loan ceilings of EDC.

There is one reason why this has happened, there is one culprit here, and that culprit is the government itself because it could have brought this legislation in some time ago, and then we would be considering it calmly rather than in an atmosphere of crisis. Instead of acting responsibly and with foresight, this government waited until the last minute, as it does so often. It has now provided the House of Commons with this legislation in a crisis atmosphere, forcing us to decide too quickly on a matter which involved the potential expenditure and the obligation to Canada of literally billions of dollars.

I should simply add that this incompetence in economic matters is not at all confined to EDC. Another example is the Bank Act. The Bank Act has been delayed. It has been more than two years since this government brought to the House of Commons its White Paper on revisions to the Bank Act. As hon. members will recall, the Bank Act has to be revised every ten years. The date of the last revision was 1967. What we get instead of action we need are two extensions to the 1967 act because this government is so unable to manage that it cannot bring forward its amendments, and it cannot bring forward a new bill on time. We are told that the bill is ready but that the government will not bring it forward because, presumably, it does not want the people of Canada to know what the Prime Minister meant when he said the other day to me that the