

Employment Support Bill

Mr. Woolliams: It was 15 per cent.

Mr. Perrault:—you may claim 15 per cent but you did not even get 5 per cent, so there was a notable failure even with the reduced figure. Canadian-U.S. relations plummeted to an abysmal record low and we suffered the worst of two possible worlds. We alienated both the United Kingdom and the United States.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Perrault: Yet, certain members of the official opposition are taking up that theme of U.S. alienation, but I wonder if that argument is being advanced seriously. The government has acted quickly to meet a difficult situation. It has acted quickly because of many practical considerations which have been mentioned adequately in this debate by members on both sides of the House.

One of the considerations is simply that "business is business". By that I mean every effort has to be made now to assist Canadian businessmen to maintain their U.S. trade connections. If during a three-month period trading connections are lost which have been built over many, many years, at an incredible cost, if brand name identification is lost, if distribution and outlets are lost or disrupted, we could then have problems which might last well beyond three months, six months or even a ten-year period. All of us know this and that is one of the reasons we have acted quickly. We have acted quickly, not with any kind of mistaken assumption that this program is going to be the end-all and be-all or the final word on the subject. The program represents a first step to help the workers and industries in Canada through this difficult period.

Those in business are aware of the fact that our trade connections in the United States have in many cases been developed over a period of many years and that they represent an investment almost beyond calculation. The loss of outlets, distribution patterns and name identification could be substantial and serious unless we act now to provide supplementary job security support for the workers of this country.

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) advanced the view yesterday that efforts should be made to diversify Canada's trade. This theme was picked up by the leader of the New Democratic Party, and both made very interesting speeches. I think hon. members enjoyed listening to them. However, one wonders that any responsible leaders in Canada can at this time give voice to this kind of criticism. Various efforts have been made, particularly under the leadership of the present Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Pepin), in respect of Canada's trade diversification. Trade diversification has been one of the major initiatives of this government.

Does the Leader of the Opposition suggest seriously that Canadian activity in the Pacific realm and in Asia has been dedicated merely to cultural exchange and archeological studies? As a matter of fact and record, there never has been a greater effort exerted by a Canadian government to develop diversified markets. This, too, is not fair criticism of this government.

[Mr. Perrault.]

A few weeks ago I was a member of the Canadian government mission to China.

Mr. McCleave: How is your ping pong?

Mr. Perrault: I lost 21 to 17. The economic mission represented a working group of government people and businessmen. It was a productive expedition which will lead undoubtedly to expansion and diversification of trade. Yet without any doubt, despite the fact that as a result of the initiative thousands of new jobs may be provided for the workers of this country, we are almost certain to hear the same kind of shop-worn opposition criticism directed at the government, that we have "failed to diversify".

What are the facts? The facts which are known to those on that side and on this side of the House are these: It is very difficult indeed to be a neighbour of a large nation when you are outnumbered ten to one and when you lack population to achieve your own economies of scale within the boundaries of your own nation. Canadians know it is difficult. It is difficult for the neighbours of Soviet Russia and it is difficult for the neighbours of China. It is difficult for all the neighbours of the United States.

We discover in a relationship of that kind, wherever it exists in this world, that smaller nations are not the masters of their own fate or the captains of their economic souls. All of the claptrap and demagoguery one hears in this country, that we can establish "economic independence" here and now, provide "full employment", "buy back our economy" and "have total control", is designed for people who do not know the facts or who are unwilling to admit them.

It is extremely difficult to live next door to a very large nation like the United States. Every action taken by a nation of that size has a profound effect on the economy of a smaller nation. We know that. We know also that some try to make political gains by saying, why can you not stand up and talk big to this nation or any other nation? If certain members of the opposition would park their political prejudices outside the door they would candidly and refreshingly admit the fact that it would be inconceivable were not a great percentage of our trade to be with the United States. Because they have more people there and a market, it costs less to export there and Canadians can make more profit by shipping there. That does not mean this government does not believe it is essential to diversify as much as we possibly can under existing circumstances. We know that. But when a nation lives by export, as does Canada, it is influenced inevitably by the economic vagaries of its customers.

It is a source of amazement to me to hear people in this House and across the land stand up and say that we have to strike an absolutely independent economic policy when in the world of 1971 even the United States of America is not economically independent. There is no thoroughly independent economy in the world today. For Canada to aspire to immediate economic independence when we "live and die" by export more than any other nation in the world is the worst kind of political tomfoolery.