

Employment Support Bill

billions of dollars. Parliament and the country have a right to know how the money is being spent, rather than waiting for a year to hear the minister say, "We goofed it all up again, fellows." We can save the country a lot of money if we have access to the necessary information.

Another argument in favour of disclosure of information is that there is a great tendency to mistakes—and I say this as my leader would say it, with the greatest of kindness, thinking only of the minister and the difficulties he faces in his portfolio. Through not being compelled to keep this House informed of the actions of his department, even this energetic minister or some of those around him might turn slothful. We could save him a great deal of trouble by catching the mistakes, rather than perpetuate them until the end of the year when the whole package comes in and the evidence and the costs are before us in that particular form. The experience we have had is that disclosure has been all to the good and that everyone has benefited by having information available to him. This is a long-range program which makes disclosure even more important. Also, disclosure is one of the best methods of ensuring that government departments operate with whatever competence is available to them.

• (8:30 p.m.)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order, please. The Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Pepin) wishes to speak.

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): Just a few words, Mr. Speaker. There are two points, really, in the amendment—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order, please. The hon. member for Cape Breton-East Richmond (Mr. MacInnis).

Mr. MacInnis: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order, though it is one which I do not wish to press home except to remind the minister where he has gone wrong. I would call your attention to the fact that the minister has already participated in this debate. The Chair did not recognize the minister, but the fact remains that he made his remarks and then surrendered the floor to the member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent), thereby confirming the fact that he had already participated in the debate. I do not wish to press the point home, but it shows that the minister has gone wrong in more ways than one.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order, please. Does the minister have something to say on the point of order?

Mr. Pepin: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I should like to ask members if I can get unanimous consent to take part in this debate for the second time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): This might be the best way to clarify the point. It was the impression of the Chair that the minister rose and asked a long question. However, the hon. member for Cape Breton-East Richmond (Mr. MacInnis) has a point and I think it could be solved at this time by allowing the minister, if the House agrees, to speak a second time with unanimous consent.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Would the House agree to allow the minister to speak a second time?

Some hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Broadbent: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I will give my consent only on the grounds that, unlike his parliamentary secretary, the minister will deal directly with the amendment.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): The Chair is not in a position to allow hon. members to put conditions upon their consent. The hon. member either gives consent or does not, and if he does not the minister will not speak. The Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce.

Mr. Pepin: Mr. Speaker, again I shall have to be on Caesar's side and not on Caesar's wife's side. I do so because I know how unhappy my hon. friend from Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent) would be on the government side, and that is a fate of which I should like to deprive him for a long time to come.

The hon. member raises two aspects of clause 21 in his amendment. One deals mainly with the fact that the clause as it appears in the bill does not anticipate that there will be a report on what size grant has been given to each company. I think that is the main point that he makes. The second point that he makes deals with the fact that reporting will not take place more often than once a year.

On the first point I must grant that the information relative to the amount of assistance granted to a firm for a plant and the level of employment and production of a plant is not going to be provided. Rightly or wrongly, this is considered confidential information. I say rightly or wrongly—and of course one could argue, but this is the practice in Canada. We have a number of other bills in my department which are applied in the same way, such as bills providing for research and development support. In this case companies make the point that if their opposition knew how much they were going to spend on research and development, and if they knew the area of research and development in which the money was to be used, they might be damaged in the competitive process.

Mr. Broadbent: On a question of privilege, Mr. Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): The hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent) on a question of privilege.

Mr. Broadbent: I would not want to suggest that the minister deliberately distorted my argument, but I took great care to point out to him that research and development information, for example, was one thing that was not being required. I listed many other things that should be required that might threaten the competitive position of a firm in order to point out that what I was asking for did not—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order, please.

Mr. Pepin: This afternoon, when looking at the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) asking for a