

Explosives Act

The explosives manufacturing industry in Canada has enjoyed a better safety factor than many others.

It is also gratifying to note that the parliamentary secretary has taken into consideration problems in relation to ammonium nitrate and the use of diesel fuel. The previous bill did not consider this aspect at all. This is probably the most common explosive used in the mining industry today, and because of the mixed condition of the explosive it has to be handled with a great deal of care. Many mining companies operating quarries were not handling this explosive carefully enough before the informative discussions that took place several years ago.

It has always been my opinion that we should make an extreme effort to clean up those messes which have been left for many years by mining companies at quarry sites, and by prospectors in various parts of the country. Years ago it was a simple procedure for a prospector to buy a couple of cases of dynamite, take it to a prospecting site which showed little promise after a relatively small amount of drilling, and then cache the dynamite with fuses and caps in an unprotected place, and move on to another site, repeating the same process.

I know of accidents that occurred in my own community around Kirkland Lake, Gowganda and Cobalt when children found dynamite or caps. Fortunately in most cases they have taken these to their parents before something serious has happened. This has always been a danger in developing areas where proper care has not been taken in the handling of explosives. This situation was brought forcefully to our attention regarding a quarry field where the FLQ found an almost unlimited and unprotected source of explosives.

I believe, like most hon. members, that we should strengthen our laws in respect of explosives. Explosives are very dangerous, particularly to the young and others who are unaware of the danger. For this reason explosives must be kept in protected locations. Producing mines have always followed this course by maintaining powder and cap houses under suitable control at a reasonable distance. This has certainly not been true of quarries operated by construction companies, and it has not been true of many farmers who in the past used limited amounts of explosives.

The government should be congratulated for tightening up this legislation. The provision in this bill in respect to the transportation of explosives by motor vehicle will prove to be of prime importance. I am sure that anyone who has travelled the northern highways has been surprised to see very large trucks with relatively small signs indicating they are carrying explosives. These trucks regularly travel in normal traffic, with no other safety precaution and only that one small sign on the front.

Star Transfer has for many years hauled explosives from Parry Sound on Highway No. 11, particularly on weekends in very heavy traffic. Fortunately, and mainly because of the competence of the drivers, no serious accident has occurred. I think everyone will agree that this practice is potentially hazardous. The government has done much to eliminate this hazard.

Another potentially dangerous situation is the use of agricultural fertilizers and fuel oil. This is mainly because

[Mr. Peters.]

many people are unaware of the danger. The product is being used for a different purpose, but there is always the danger of a small explosion setting off a larger one. This is particularly so when people without knowledge of the danger carelessly handle the materials. Once people have an indication of the potential danger, the danger itself is lessened. The last time we had a bill of this nature before us we provided for a warning to be placed on products stating that under certain circumstances with extreme force they would explode. That warning should be brought to the attention of all those who may be using such products and may not be aware of the potential danger.

I should again like to congratulate the government for having removed the words "safety cartridges" from the bill. I am violently opposed to the elimination of hunting rights in the northern parts of Canada. Had the previous bill been passed and enforced, no storekeeper would have been able to build the required facilities for storing ammunition. This would obviously have provided complete gun control, unless there was bootlegging of safety cartridges. The removal of those words does not seem to weaken the legislation. What the bill will now do is control explosives, but will leave the decision in respect of gun control in Canada to be made by the House in the form of other legislation. If we want what people refer to commonly as strong gun controls we should provide them by separate legislation rather than bringing in such controls by the back door, which is what the previous bill would have done.

I am very much in favour of the proposed changes to bring the act up to date. I do not see the date when the act was last amended, but I think the bill was originally proposed to control explosives in the mining industry in the Yukon and areas such as Cobalt. The situation has changed, and we require new regulations. I hope the parliamentary secretary keeps track of this legislation to see that it is not changed before it receives third reading, in order that it remains solely an explosives control act, rather than something many of us do not want to see in this bill.

[Translation]

Mr. C.-A. Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, I wish to commend the parliamentary secretary for introducing the bill and for explaining it, because before reading the legislation I had fears about the question of safety cartridges being included.

I think that now we can profitably discuss the bill, concerning the safety of sales, possession and transport. In years passed anybody could own explosives, in my area at least. They were often kept in unlocked hangers, open day and night to anyone who wanted to get dynamite or detonators and so forth.

This is why we had so many accidents in my area. Sales permits were issued to general stores, or anyone for that matter so it seems. I do not know on what grounds they were issued, but I believe the act tolerated it, if there was an act to truly protect the people. I remember that logging companies, mining companies a few years ago were still carrying dynamite to work in automobiles or small trucks. Dynamite was left overnight on the site without supervision. Often 100 or 150 sticks of dynamite were missing. Nobody knew who had taken it. I believe, as the hon.