

Employment Support Bill

the Canadian Parliament. If I were to do that I would expect to be chastised publicly in the House and on television by the hon. member for Edmonton West, and I would know that my political future would come to an end because of that accusation. I know too that I would be embarrassing the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau)—and that is the last thing I would like to do.

Under the textile bill I could do a number of unorthodox things, too. Then there is the Canada Shipping Act and the Fisheries Act. All those acts could be used wrongly if ministers were so inclined. The point I am making and it was made already by a number of people is that if we are to change the methods by which orders in council are handled it should be done in some other way and not by the employment support bill.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): This is a specious argument.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I learned something from what the minister said. I finally get the explanation of the government's behaviour under the temporary wheat reserves legislation. The minister just told us that in his view, and I suppose it is a view shared by his colleagues in the government, all legislation is a blank cheque.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Stanfield: That is what he said, every piece of legislation is a blank cheque. That is what the minister said.

Mr. Pepin: Under the law. To do what is provided under the law. If you are going to quote me, quote me properly.

Mr. Stanfield: I do not want to misquote the hon. minister. I was very surprised by what he said.

Mr. Baldwin: I was not.

Mr. Stanfield: I must admit that it threw a little light on the behaviour of the government when he said that every statute and every law is a blank cheque. How do you interpret that?

Mr. Pepin: I didn't say that.

Mr. Stanfield: What did the minister say, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Pepin: I said, and I will even read my own words—I am sure I did not say anything different—that, "Every bill is a blank cheque to do what the bill allows the government to do".

An hon. Member: That is different?

Mr. Baldwin: It is worse.

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, "Every bill is a blank cheque". What the minister says has not changed anything a bit because the government has interpreted how it proposes to go about accomplishing the purpose of the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act and it chooses to feel it has a blank cheque to choose its own methods. We finally have an explanation of its extraordinary behaviour.

I want to repudiate as strongly as I can the philosophy expressed by the minister today, that every bill involves a blank cheque to the minister or the government to carry out the purpose of the bill. This obviously is an absurd and very dangerous doctrine for a minister to put forward.

Mr. Pepin: If I had said it.

Mr. Stanfield: Just checking the minister as he now put it—I suspect he reads *Hansard* and he will find it was a considerably narrower statement that he made before. But taking the statement that every bill provides a blank cheque to the minister and the government as to the manner in which to carry out the bill—

Mr. Pepin: To do what the law says.

Mr. Stanfield: To do what the bill says—a blank cheque. I repudiate that. I regret very much that a minister of the government of Canada finds it possible to stand up in the House of Commons and make a statement such as that.

Some hon. Members: Shame!

An hon. Member: There are lots of things you can have a look at.

Mr. Stanfield: There are lots of things we can have a look at, including this government, and you need a pretty strong stomach to do it, too.

As to the amount of discretion involved in legislation, of course it varies from bill to bill. There is no question about that. The minister dragged in some red herrings. He dragged in the National Energy Board suggesting that, *reductio ad absurdum*—what an argument—if you are going to put forward the kind of argument the hon. member for Edmonton West put forward, then you are going to say that all decisions by the National Energy Board are going to have this particular difficulty. This is about as irrelevant to the discussion as anything one could mention. No one is attempting to suggest that this House should pass judgment on every decision of the National Energy Board or every decision of the Canadian Transport Commission. We are talking about regulations of the Governor in Council under a very vague and general piece of legislation. I am sure the minister would agree that this motion has nothing to do with proceedings before the National Energy Board. It has nothing to do with whether a minister tries to be crooked or not. It has nothing to do with the personal behaviour or ethics of the minister. The fact is that this is a very wide ranging bill in terms of the discretion of the minister. Frankly, it has shocked me that we should contemplate passing a statute of such wide and sweeping purposes. Perhaps its purposes are not so sweeping. I am shocked that we should contemplate passage of a bill which provides so little in the way of direction and so much in the way of discretion to the government.

• (5:20 p.m.)

I am not suggesting that it is possible or practical for the minister to present to the House a bill that is more precise, and that can effectively narrow the discretion required in the regulations if the bill is to accomplish its purpose. That is not the point I am making. If this bill is to stay on