

Employment Support Bill

ticular period described in clause 18(a), the assistance period, is determined by the date of the action of the foreign country, as in this particular case.

There is no clause in this bill which spells out, for instance, that the employment support arises out of the consequences of a diminution in employment due to the American government's surcharge. All this starts as of August 15, when the surcharge was imposed. We are now coming to the point at which the legislation is likely to be passed, and the regulations will be brought down which will govern the type of assistance that will be given. But all of these will relate back to the period starting on August 15. Nothing is lost. For instance, say, and I am taking a hypothetical example, that the common market, Japan, or some other country with which we have fairly extensive trading relations were, for its own purposes, to take some sort of action not necessarily involving a surcharge. That action could be a heavy import quota against Canada or some sort of other non-tariff barrier which has the effect of eliminating imports.

For instance, it could be required by common market countries that pulp and paper products must be carried from Canada to the port of destination in the common market country in a common market country bottom, in other words, in a ship belonging to one of those countries. This would cause very serious dislocation. These are the types of non-tariff barriers I mean. There could be a stipulation that financing shall be arranged through certain types of financial agencies in a particular sort of way, and the practice stipulated might be followed only by common market country financial institutions. In other words, it is like calling for tenders and then writing specifications in such a way that only one type of machinery can qualify. These are ways in which the actual non-tariff barriers operate.

The bill contemplates something of that kind. The action taken by the other country will have to be described in the order in council and all I say is, Parliament must know about it. Parliament cannot be put in the position of forever writing blank cheques.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): This government came to us with Bill C-207 regarding ministers of state who were to be appointed, fired and changed by order in council. That was a blank cheque. Parliament insisted, and the government, I think, saw the light and decided that the order in council regarding any change would come before Parliament and be subject to affirmative resolution after a debate of seven hours, that is, two normal debating days. That is all I ask here. I am asking all hon. members on all sides of the House, is this to be another occasion when Parliament says to the cabinet, "All right, these situations may arise either now or ten years hence and here is a series of blank cheques." That is what Bill C-262 means. It is a complete blank cheque.

I say, Mr. Speaker, that when the government wants to cash one of these blank cheques it will have to come back to Parliament to get the cheque validated. That is only right. Otherwise, what sort of thing is contemplated? If you want to listen to delightful vagueness, and when I say delightful vagueness I really mean gobbledygook, listen to the way the parliamentary secretary answered questions

of mine as reported at page 46:7 of the committee hearings. I asked the hon. member for Okanagan Boundary (Mr. Howard):

—there is a very general description in the bill in Clause 3 and you refer to it as trade restrictions of other countries. In the way it is described in the bill it says:

—temporary import surtaxes or take other actions having a like effect—

First of all, what is the contemplation of the government of the 'like effect'? Is it a diminution of unemployment? Is it a diminution in exports or just what is it? This is really important for the individuals because it seems as if parliamentarians are giving a blank cheque for the future with regard to this so-called framework. What do you mean by having a 'like effect'?

The hon. member answered:

I think it is quite clear that we mean diminishing employment, that there is a diminishing employment factor and this is when the proposed act will be invoked.

I went on to say:

For instance, if the action were to be a devaluation of a foreign currency which then would make the export for Canada at a prohibitive price.

That wording should have been, "—make the export from Canada at a prohibitive price." I continue:

Is that a similar action? It would have a similar effect.

Then the hon. member replied:

It is very possible that the bill could be invoked under that kind of a circumstance.

I will move on a little further. The hon. member said, as recorded at page 46:8:

—I think there is a key factor that has to be borne in mind that no action is going to be taken unless there is a massive unemployment factor involved.

Further on, in the next paragraph, he is reported as saying:

I think it is a hypothetical question to try to anticipate the kinds of problems we might get into at some time in the future. We are drawing a general kind of legislation that can be invoked for a variety of problems and I do not think that we can spell out specifically in detail the occasions on which it might be invoked. Each one would have to be examined very carefully by the government before they made a decision to invoke this proposed act. I do not think anyone in government could say today that it would be invoked in any particular kind of circumstances.

The final paragraph I shall quote from this committee meeting is found at page 46:10. It reads:

I am not prepared to give you a commitment today. The government is going to use this bill for a hypothetical problem that may come along in the future. I cannot do that. Each situation will have to be regarded on its own, but the legislation is of a broad nature.

At the meeting after that, the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Pepin), answering my colleague, the hon. member for Battle River (Mr. Downey), is reported as saying:

No, really I think the ground was pretty well covered the last time. Those who answered that question with Mr. Howard leading, said that it was extremely difficult to anticipate situations. He emphasized that the bill gave the government the capacity to react and to react rapidly. That was one of the fundamental aspects of this bill. Second, the action to be reacted against, if I may use these words, would have to be one of great importance, exceptionally destructive with massive effects—all these words were used here last time—and sincerely I do not care too much to go into anticipation of what it might be because it is terribly difficult to do so. If you want me to do so, I would have to go into all kinds of considera-