

Small Businesses Loans Act

not so sad, it would be amusing. The Government is like the mouse that came out and did not even roar.

This situation is also frightening because it is an indication of the Government's attitude when dealing with trade issues and disputes. It is obvious that the Government did not have a coherent strategy to effectively deal with these unilateral actions originating in the United States. It is obvious that the Government was scrambling to find some way to counteract the American imposition of a tariff on cedar shakes and shingles. The fact that it imposed a tariff on Christmas trees, books and tea-bags is an indication that it chose anything in a desperate act to show that it was taking action. The Government's measures were not a result of a coherent policy that had been thought through, or the result of a plan that was meant to maximize the effect on the United States and minimize the adverse effects on Canadians.

Mr. Hockin: It worked.

Mr. de Jong: The Hon. Minister says that it worked. It frightens me when a Minister of the Crown states that it worked because the Americans have not withdrawn their tariff while we are withdrawing our counter measures. How can the Government claim that it worked?

If those in charge of negotiating a free trade agreement with the United States believe that this measure has worked, I am frightened for the future well being of this country. If the best they can do to counter the American action on cedar shakes and shingles is to slap a tariff on books, Christmas trees and teabags, which later had to be withdrawn, then heaven help us when they draw up a free trade agreement.

All Parties have agreed to have one Member speak to Bill C-69 and not roast the Government too thoroughly over this legislation. We have agreed to allow the Government to proceed with this Bill, with its tail between its leg, in order to retract the most inappropriate action it took earlier. Hopefully the Government will have learned a lesson.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): Is the House ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Motion agreed to, Bill read the second time and, by unanimous consent, considered in committee, reported, read the third time and passed.

SMALL BUSINESSES LOANS ACT

MEASURE TO AMEND

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (For the Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion) moved that Bill C-63, an Act to amend the Small Businesses Loans Act, be read the second time and referred to a Legislative Committee.

Mr. Lewis: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe you will find that there is unanimous consent to have the Bill proceed to the Committee of the Whole rather than a Legislative Committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): Is there unanimous consent?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Indeed, Madam Speaker, there has been consultation and we agree.

Mr. Manly: Agreed.

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)): Madam Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to speak to the House today on Bill C-63.

The purpose of this important Bill is to amend and improve the Small Businesses Loans Act, which has already produced good results, by expanding its scope to make fishermen eligible for the loans guaranteed under the Act.

If we look at the number of loans granted so far, we find that this Act has been extremely useful. Since the program was introduced in 1961 and until March 31, 1986, 210,533 small business loans were approved for a total value of \$5.1 billion.

During the 1985-86 financial year, 23,593 loans totalling a little under \$738 million were approved, while the average loan was worth \$31,273.

The loans may have various configurations, depending on the recipients, who may be manufacturers, wholesalers, retailers, service companies, building contractors, transit companies or telecommunications firms.

• (1240)

[English]

Companies and individuals are eligible to borrow for purchase of land, renovation of their premises or construction of new facilities, or for the purchase, installation or modernization of equipment. In many cases, these have been new entrepreneurs, just starting out.

Guaranteed loans under this legislation also help existing businesses to modernize, to expand and mature into larger and more profitable operations. This means more jobs for Canadian workers and growth for our economy. We in this Government see the private sector as the engine of economic growth. At the same time, we have an important role to play. It us up