

Customs Tariff

fishing industry because of countervailing tariffs from another country. That was always the rationale that has been given and is still being given. We can see how stupid that particular claim is.

In dealing with this particular Bill, the Government of Canada must realize two things. First, it must realize that it cannot lay off its employees and hope to have a good job done in the Customs Department. The President of the Treasury Board (Mr. de Cotret), in passing down his orders to the individual Ministers, should realize that there are certain Government Departments that cannot function under such drastic reductions in staff. This particular Department is one of them.

The second thing the Government ought to realize is that in the area of tariffs, it takes two to tango. We cannot have one country, the United States, imposing such drastic tariffs while the Government of Canada is facilitating matters, clearing up the backlog and giving preferential treatment to this, that and the other thing through legislation.

With those two observations, I would say that we are looking forward to dissecting this Bill in committee so that we may try to figure out just what is included in it. We have to be very careful with this Government. We do not know what is in the Bill. We have to examine this Bill with a fine-tooth comb because the Government has the reputation of pushing things through under our noses without us really knowing what we are doing. We have to take the Minister's word for things. It took us one day to bail out the CCB through a Bill presented to the House. The Minister made statements with respect to what was in the Bill. She said such things as: "Everything is okay. This bank is not bankrupt. This is the only financial institution in Canada in trouble." The Minister also made statements such as: "We really do not want to do away with the regional bank. We do not want other banks to take over the regional bank. We have made that decision. We want a regional bank to remain in existence. We do not want other banks to take it over."

● (1600)

We listened to all of this language from the Minister of State for Finance (Mrs. McDougall). We listened to all the facts and figures which she gave. However, Hon. Members will notice that she could not tell us how many creditors there were. She could not tell us how many depositors there were. Yet, we went with the judgment of the Government. We did not want to be seen to be holding up a legitimate measure for the people of western Canada, as the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) put it. We took the Minister at her word, as we do with the Minister who has presented the Bill before us. However, we will be giving a second thought before taking any cabinet Minister in this Government at his word with respect to what is in a Bill. In other words, it is as the critic for the New Democratic Party pointed out. We are anxious to get the matter into committee in order to examine it just to see what is exactly there. It is only now, after we have seen the record of the Government, that all the people of Canada know that they

have to be very careful with respect to what the Government is doing because it is not what it says it is doing. The people of Canada know what was in the disastrous Budget. One budget night the provisions looked great; but they certainly do not look all that great now.

Those are my words of caution to the Minister who is responsible for the customs tariff. I wish to remind him that he cannot run a department without any employees. I also wish to remind him that we will be watching the situation very closely. We will not allow the Government of Canada to make that number of lay-offs in such a vital service as this one is.

I also wish to point out to the Government that the people of Canada will not take what is happening with tariffs as it relates to our products in this country. They are not going to take it much longer. There is a crisis in the lumber industry, the fishing industry and in several other industries in the country which directly relate to tariffs. However, it relates to tariffs imposed by another country on our primary producers.

With those words, Mr. Speaker, I will yield the floor to someone else who wishes to comment on the Bill.

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops-Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure to have an opportunity to rise and speak on Bill C-71, which is a most important piece of legislation in a variety of ways. I think the importance of the legislation we are debating is not necessarily with the Bill before us since the Minister has said: "Listen. There are some technical materials here with which we have to deal". Indeed, he is correct. He wants us to spend a fair bit of time discussing whether or not hand-rolled cigars with bands and ribbons on them should receive a \$1.45 preferential tariff or a \$3 one under a general tariff item. We have pages and pages of important material here before us. We are being asked to consider whether or not mine roof supports should fall under a free tariff item. There is much concern expressed with respect to hearing aids and the fact that we need to place tariffs on them. This is also true with respect to batteries, appliances, and so on for hearing aids. I suppose the Government feels we should not have a 12 per cent tariff, or a general tariff of at least 30 per cent but, perhaps, that those preferential areas should be only 8 per cent. The documentation goes on and on. Perhaps the items should be tariff-free.

It is interesting to note what this Government considers to be important. Here we are today, as the Hon. Member who spoke before me pointed out, with the forest industry literally on the edge of crisis. The United States, the major importer of our goods, is about to impose a quota, which will be passed by at least a two-thirds majority in Congress. This will mean that possibly a third of the sawmills in the country will have to close down. I see the Minister of State for Forestry (Mr. Merrithew) is in the House. We appreciate that fact. I know how concerned he must be with respect to this issue and the implications it will have on the industry. The process is beginning to move through Congress now. We are talking about one-half or one-third of Canada's major industry. Are we debating that subject in the House of Commons? Is that matter being referred to committee for ongoing discussions?