

Vehicular Seat Belts

tion of property, and the possible loss of the lives of people in other vehicles.

It has been estimated that the use of proper seat belts in trucks and private cars has cut the rate of fatal accidents by 40 per cent in North America. In this bill I am seeking to make a change in the safety provisions with respect to motor vehicles, a change which I believe is necessary and simple to bring about. No doubt other hon. members will argue that while the equipping of motor vehicles with safety facilities is a federal matter, the use of such facilities comes under provincial authority. This is quite true, and it presents a ridiculous picture.

The federal government, under the terms of the Motor Vehicle Safety Act passed by the House on March 11, 1970, has the power to prescribe, by regulation, the design, construction and functioning of motor vehicles manufactured or imported into Canada, including seat belts. But actually the Motor Vehicles Safety Act is not concerned with the use of motor vehicles since this is presently regulated by the provinces. We at the federal level can require seat belts to be in motor vehicles, but we cannot make any provision for their use.

In bringing this bill forward, Mr. Speaker, I am of course conversant with the facts I have just related. But what I am seeking here is not so much passage of the bill as drafted, but the referral of its subject matter to an appropriate committee of the House for further study, and hopefully the encouragement of federal-provincial action in an important and neglected field of Canadian transport safety.

In conclusion I would like to point out that this proposal is non-political in every sense. If the subject matter of the bill is allowed to be sent to committee for study and discussion, no doubt the committee can improve on what I have proposed. Passage of this bill or of similar legislation can save lives in this country. We in this House have the power to do that.

Mr. Don Blenkarn (Peel South): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to see that an hon. member has introduced a bill that is not dissimilar to a bill introduced in the Ontario legislature by the provincial member representing the same riding as I represent, designated as Peel South. It is imperative that some regulation be implemented, some direction, some concrete steps be taken to indicate the desired safety requirements that must be installed in motor vehicles. However, I am a bit disturbed about the form of this bill, which indicates that the Governor in Council should pass regulations prescribing classes of belts and so on.

● (1710)

One of the greatest problems we have in this country is that pieces of legislation come before us with some good concept and then the bill goes on to say, "the Governor in Council shall by regulation—". Nothing ever happens, because in many cases the regulations are never formulated. Indeed, if they are, rules are made of a quasi-criminal nature which the citizen must respect, but these rules or regulations are never brought before the elected representatives of the country for discussion, comment and detailed consideration. They are in some way pulled out of

[Mr. Mather.]

the hat by someone off in his ivory tower who decides that he and not the elected representatives of the nation should make the rules. It is that kind of thing I cannot accept.

While it is imperative that the automobile industry should be given direction in connection with safety, it is also imperative that this House of Commons give that direction. It should not be left to the whim of some inspector in some office somewhere. On this particular issue, I should like to commend the automobile industry for the efforts it has made in past years in connection with the installation of seat belts in private automobiles. Indeed, I find today that one cannot buy an automobile in which the belts do not ring or the buzzers sound or that the automobile will not start without someone hooking up a seat belt. So, this is the situation in which a private industry, the automobile industry, realizing the safety problems and criticism it has suffered as a result of books written by Nader and others, has decided to do something on its own. I am surprised this government has not given the automobile industry guidelines concerning the kinds of things members of this House, representing the people of Canada, would like to see that industry do.

Really there has been nothing. There have been pious hopes that there be safe automobiles, but really what has happened has been that we have a captive automobile industry which imposes on Canadians safety standards perhaps not even worked out in Canada, and perhaps not even those desired by Canadians, but rather requirements which come to us from across the border. The industry in Canada receives no direction from the government concerning the kinds of things we, as Canadians, require for safety on our highways.

The hon. member for Surrey-White Rock (Mr. Mather) spoke of commercial vehicles. It is high time the government of this country, where commercial trucking means so much in the transport of goods and equipment, came forward with regulations, suggestions and an innovative approach to the industry to bring in safety features that would be appropriate to conditions in Canada.

Mr. Blais: Mr. Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order, please.

Mr. Blais: Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member if he will allow it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): The question, of course, can be asked only with the consent of the hon. member.

Mr. Blenkarn: If it is a short question, Mr. Speaker, since I have only a few moments.

Mr. Blais: Mr. Speaker, I would like to know if the hon. member is for or against this bill?

Mr. Blenkarn: That is the kind of bright question I would expect from the other side.

An hon. Member: They should fasten their seat belts.

Mr. Blenkarn: That is right; they should fasten their seat belts because that is what they will need when they are fired out of here.