

Export Development Act

Hon. A. C. Abbott (Minister of State (Small Business)): Mr. Speaker, as acting Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce I am pleased to have the opportunity today to say a few words in connection with this important bill before parliament. I think my colleague adequately expressed the importance of the bill and the importance of EDC to the economy, as well as explaining why it is essential that the bill receive as prompt passage as possible. He indicated at the time he spoke that it would be quite open to the committee to interrogate the officers of EDC closely and go into any specifics they might wish.

It was particularly distressing to hear the number of speakers who rose in the opposition and levelled such unsupported allegations in the direction of EDC, particularly the hon. member for York-Simcoe (Mr. Stevens), and the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) who spoke so ignorantly about the activities of this important element of Canada's export trade. I thought the Leader of the Opposition demonstrated several of the qualities which will almost certainly restrict him from ever occupying the position of Prime Minister of this country.

An hon. Member: Don't count on it.

Mr. Abbott: Of course the hon. member says, "Don't count on it". I shudder to think of the prospects if, by some accident of fate, he was elevated to that position. It is bad enough to have him comment on those matters with which he presumably has some acquaintance. But when he rises in his place today, and suggests that because the Export Development Corporation finances overseas developments consistent with its charter and its very proud history of accomplishment, that somehow it is deliberately taking away the jobs of Canadians by the so-called short-term benefits to them, it is so outrageous and palpably absurd as to make it shameful that a person purporting to be an alternative to the prime minister of this country should ever make such a speech.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: No more shameful than our deficit on imports.

Mr. Abbott: He made specific reference to the foundation of a mini-steel mill in New Jersey as an example of his indignation at the taking away of Canadian jobs. This represents a very important development that is being exercised by a company in Whitby which has set up mini-steel mills, not only in Canada but elsewhere in the world. As a result, it has employed as many as 1,500 man-years at this plant, creating this very important element of export. To say that this is somehow setting up a steel mill in New Jersey to compete with Canadians demonstrates once and for all, if we ever needed any demonstration, what an economic, industrial illiterate we have in the Leader of the Opposition.

● (1602)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Abbott: He went on to question the kind of countries the Export Development Corporation is dealing with, countries such as Romania, Poland, and others. He cast insulting aspersions on them. Moreover, he suggested that somehow EDC was guaranteeing loans, with money that would otherwise have been spent in Canada to create jobs in plants for Canadians, and helping to set up competitive industries abroad. He took that as a dastardly betrayal of Canadian economic interests.

I would have hopes that even so parochial and restricted an observer as the Leader of the Opposition might realize that the rest of the world does not stand hopefully waiting for any of those industries to be set up by Canada. Countries such as Poland have other nations of the world eagerly hoping they may be given an opportunity to employ their people to help set up industry, to create paper making machinery, to do all the things that the Export Development Corporation is financing in order to give Canadian manufacturers jobs.

I cite a very outstanding example, the recent contract that the Bell Telephone Company, through Northern Telecom, has with Saudi Arabia. Here is a billion dollar contract competed for and won by a Canadian corporation in that important and growing part of the world. It is to be partly financed through EDC. It will be a profitable deal, as have been nearly all the deals that the EDC has conducted. It is going to bring thousands of jobs to Canadians, not short-term jobs, and will help to create the kind of industrial fibre we need to maintain if we are going to employ as many Canadians as we must.

Far from a record of failure, as has been suggested by the Leader of the Opposition, the Export Development Corporation has been a very successful corporation. It has enjoyed a triple A credit rating with the leading firm of Moody's and with another leading one as well. I forget the name of it. There is no other corporation in the world that enjoys this triple A rating of two leading corporations of this kind.

I am sorry the hon. member of York-Simcoe is not here. He expressed some very dark suspicions about the financial standing of the Export Development Corporation. Anybody who knows the hon. member for York-Simcoe and his own history realizes he must have quite a profound knowledge of shaky operations. I was singularly interested in a comment he made in his speech on this bill, reported at page 4815 of *Hansard* for April 24, and I quote:

If you have any trouble in the lending business, you never admit it.

I am sure that was the credo by which the former president of the Bank of Western Canada conducted his business. However, I assure him that this kind of subterfuge he may have believed in when he was in the banking business is not the kind of behaviour displayed by officials of the Export Development Corporation.

When those officials appear with the minister before the finance committee I feel certain they will be able to account for themselves very capably as to the deals in which they are involved. They will point out they have never had a year in which they have not enjoyed a profit. They do not need these additional funds because they have somehow failed, but