

Employment Support Bill

Mr. Olson: I did not try to define who that will be. I said if we are to remain competitive in the United States market, someone from the producers through the processing industry will have to reduce their price by the amount of the surcharge to get into that market and be competitive. It is those kinds of situations, where the producer, processing plant or whoever absorbs them to remain competitive, that we intend to compensate.

Mr. Max Saltzman (Waterloo): Mr. Speaker, it has been a great night in Parliament. Three ministers have spoken. First, we heard from the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Pepin), then the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson), and we have just had the pleasure of listening to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson).

An hon. Member: Now we have you.

● (9:40 p.m.)

Mr. Saltzman: In addition, outside of the question period I have never seen quite so many cabinet ministers in the chamber, not to mention the untotaled complement of parliamentary secretaries. It has been a great night. With this great entourage one expected that momentous things would be said, that the big guns were almost out. One was almost inclined to put his hands over his ears lest they be shattered by the wisdom and clarity that was going to emerge from the government benches. Instead of a bang, we got an insignificant "pfft" like a wet squib. At least there was some humour in what the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce said. He brought all his charm to bear on trying to make an impossible bill palatable. The bill is completely ridiculous and even the charm of the Minister of Trade and Commerce, who probably could make rape look like romance, did not succeed. If there is a trophy to be given for the most ridiculous speech, it should be given to the Minister of Finance. He made a very brave speech to us tonight. He said, "I went down there and I told them this and I told them that. They were going to hear from Canada and we weren't going to take it lying down." Of course, he came back empty-handed with a few fingers missing. He reminds me of a little kid who has just emerged from a dark alley bleeding from head to toe and says, "You should have seen me teach that big boy a lesson" and then he turns around and says, "There's a smaller kid up the road; let's go and beat him up." The one who will get beaten up by this bill is the Canadian taxpayer.

We are faced with a situation which will create serious difficulties for Canada. Instead of saying, "Well, it is the Americans who have created the problem for us; they should be prepared to pay for it," we say, "No, they have created the problem for us but we should pay for it." We have made our brave little speech to them but they did not listen to us, so we propose to bring in a bill to compensate Canadians who have been hurt by measures imposed by the United States.

How long does a country like Canada intend to go on turning the other cheek? It is not as though we have been difficult with the United States, though some of us wish we had been difficult with the United States on

occasions. The United States has very few grounds for complaint against Canada. We have co-operated in virtually every way which would prove helpful to the United States. Throughout our history we have more than proven our willingness to encourage and support the United States. For example, we have held our foreign exchange reserves in the form of United States treasury bills, and instead of holding gold we held American dollars, thereby running the risk of loss due to the depreciation of United States currency.

I do not say the Americans are ungrateful. They have a problem. We know they have a problem. We are sympathetic with them, but only up to a point. We are sympathetic with those Americans who despise the Viet Nam war as much as we do. This is a situation they have created for themselves and they are now asking the rest of the world to pay for it and we are being asked to be understanding, to take it without using words like "retaliation."

The minister went on to say, "We told them down in the United States that this is going to hurt them more than it hurts us". I do not see it. I think it is hurting us more. The minister has said that no other country stands to be so deeply affected as Canada, and we can all agree with this. The minister has defined the problem, but if we look for a solution from his side of the House we do not find one. In any event, he has only posed part of the problem; the other part is the party he represents. He is the problem, his party is the problem and the government to which he belongs is the problem. It is they who have contributed to placing us in this intolerable situation where we are so dependent on the United States market that if the Americans impose any measures we suffer more than anyone else. This situation, difficult as it may be for us, could have been handled relatively easily had we created a climate of development for Canada, had we created a climate of growth and of employment in Canada.

Despite all the statistics the minister has rattled off, he is unconvincing. His government is responsible for putting Canada into an economic downward spiral. They have created unemployment intentionally, and into this kind of vortex has come the difficulty arising from the United States surtax. We could have weathered the surtax without too much trouble if we had full employment in this country, because those resources which are to be excluded from the American market could have been absorbed by the Canadian market. So the minister has a problem. But it is a direct responsibility of the government he represents. It is useless for him to go around complaining and wringing his hands and looking for someone else to blame.

The Minister of Trade and Commerce presented the bill to the House as the best means of helping in this situation. I want to ask some questions about whether it is in fact the best means of helping. This is what we must decide. As we look at the bill we should ask ourselves: Is this the way to handle the situation, or is there something else we can do? Can we best help by giving an amount of money in an ill-defined way, or making it available, we do not know how it is to be used, we do not