

Customs Act

checked to find out what 30 grams is in relation to a letter. Thirty grams is an ordinary envelope and seven sheets of ordinary paper. If the Customs Department has reason to believe that a package weighing over 30 grams contains material which should not be entering the country, it has the power to open it.

Due to the movement of drugs and other material into the country, I believe that this particular clause is necessary. However, I would caution anyone who is writing a letter of over seven pages that perhaps they should break it into two letters so that the Customs officials would not be allowed to open it. I do not know what amount of drugs one could bring in in a letter of less than 30 grams. The terms "nickle", "dime", and "quarter", or something are used. That is supposed to be a gram or two grams. I do not know if they can flatten it out to make a gram, but they would certainly not make much money if they had to reduce the size of each package to less than 30 grams.

I hope the Minister will be prepared to provide us with any information that we require on Clause 99, which is the only questionable clause in the Bill. I believe that the Minister should be prepared to provide any information that anyone requires concerning this aspect. Again, this is essentially a Bill that was proposed by the previous Liberal administration and therefore I hope the House will give its speedy passage.

● (1600)

Mr. Simon de Jong (Regina East): Mr. Speaker, I wish to speak briefly to Bill C-59, an Act respecting customs. I understand that the debate will be short. When one is the third speaker on a Bill such as this, which does not have much ideological input, one does not have much left to say after the Minister introduces the Bill and the spokesperson from the Official Opposition covers most of the points to be made. There is not much disagreement among the Parties concerning this Bill.

It closely resembles Bill C-6 that was tabled by the previous Liberal Government in January, 1984. On June 25, 1985, the former Minister of National Revenue tabled Bill C-59 for first reading. According to the Minister's press release, the purpose of the Bill is to overhaul completely Canada's 118-year-old Customs Act.

Today, we have a new Minister of National Revenue and I want to congratulate him on his new portfolio. I look forward to working with him. Unfortunately, in the past Revenue Canada has been a Department whose Ministers were either on the way up or on the way down. I believe that its importance has not been recognized and I hope the Government will not follow past practice. I hope the Minister, whom I know on a personal level to be of good judgment, will continue some of the reforms undertaken by the previous Minister in the Department of National Revenue. It is an important Department which the Government should not neglect. We have seen how it has become a graveyard for some Ministers under the previous Liberal administration.

Let me return to the Act. The usual practice has been to amend the Customs Act periodically in response to specific situations. Bill C-59 seeks to address and remove a number of archaic provisions and redundancies while introducing measures which will bring the administration of the Act into a more contemporary vogue. For example, Bill C-59 will codify procedures for the reporting of persons, goods and conveyances crossing Canada's borders to four sections as opposed to the present 30 sections. Provision has also been made, which is an improvement on the Liberal Bill, for the payment of any interest on duties paid and later refunded. Notwithstanding the need for improvements, some questions remain and hopefully will be raised in the legislative committee.

The impact that the Customs and Excise Branch of the Department of National Revenue has upon not only the movement of individuals and goods but also upon the federal Treasury is worth noting. Collections from these sections have been as follows: In 1982-83, \$17.3 billion in total, of which \$4.4 billion was collected from the importation of goods. In 1983-84, \$16.6 billion in total was collected from Customs and Excise, of which \$5.2 billion was collected from the importation of goods. In 1984-85, \$18 billion in total was collected, of which \$5 billion was collected from the importation of goods. The total revenue collected by the Customs and Excise Branch constitutes approximately 25 per cent of federal revenues.

The Customs Branch is concerned primarily with the processing of goods and individuals across Canada's international boundaries. The point at which Customs officers are present include 114 border crossing points along the Canada-U.S. border, 17 international airports, and 176 other airports and points of entry. Customs officers are responsible for the enforcement in whole or in part of some 60 different Acts which include everything from the Aeronautics Act to the Fertilizers Act to the Visiting Forces Act.

A briefing document itemized the objectives of the Customs Branch in their order of importance under three headings: First, to ensure the collection of duties; second, to control the movement of people and goods; and third, to protect Canadian industry from real or potential injury caused by actual or contemplated import of dumped or subsidized goods and other forms of unfair competition. Customs Branch has allocated some 7,201 person years. It is this section that is the most visible of the Customs Branch.

In November, 1983, an evaluation study was undertaken in the Department. Let me quote from that study:

A new breed of Inspector is being hired, who on average is better educated, better trained, has higher job expectations and different attitudes—The new recruit is believed to be more "enforcement oriented" and is having significant and unmeasured influence on the inspection role.

I put that on the record because despite all of the rules, regulations and safeguards that may exist, it comes down to the fact that the individual judgment of officers surely is most important. The study goes on to conclude that no matter how well intentioned entry laws may be, compliance with them is, in the final analysis, directly proportionate to the Depart-