

Employment Support Bill

the government's intentions in respect of facing up to the major problem of unemployment in this country and the major problems of employment and development. If we do not it may be necessary for us to propose some amendments to this measure.

Mr. David Lewis (York South): Mr. Speaker, once again the government has indulged in a series of public relations activities and has produced a bill which in our view is mere window dressing, designed to persuade the people of Canada that the government is doing something when in fact the government, through this bill, is doing very little if indeed anything at all. Furthermore, it is an attempt in my view to distract the attention of the people of Canada from the very important fact that we had massive unemployment in this country deliberately created by the government long before the Nixon announcement about the surtax. I have no doubt that an attempt will now be made by this government, and by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) later, to paint a rosy picture about the outlook for the future in respect of the economy and then lay the blame for the difficulties on President Nixon's policies.

I say that kind of an analysis is untenable and indeed much less than honest. When one heard through the press, and through the public relations media in which the minister and the government indulged for some days before this bill was introduced, that something would be done to offset the effect of this tax, one hoped it would be something substantial. One was prepared to assist in anything that would really help the workers who might be affected by the surtax and help the Canadian economy. We indicated our concern by agreeing to second reading of the bill today, but I want to say we are extremely unhappy about the measure before us. It was impossible for us to decide how we might deal with the measure so far as a vote is concerned without hearing the minister, the Minister of Finance and more of the details. I must say to the minister that his speech today was one of the least revealing I have heard him make in this House. Therefore, no one need assume we will necessarily support the bill which I think is a shameful abortion of a remedy that is needed to meet a serious crisis created not only by President Nixon's announcement but also by the policies of this government.

● (4:20 p.m.)

I said at the time the cabinet ministers went to Washington that I was getting fed up with the constant, mendicant, begging pilgrimages of the government of Canada to Washington cap in hand, a kind of procedure which in this case has proved useless despite the minister's attempt to say that certain things have been gained, and a kind of procedure which has always been undignified and humiliating to this country. I smiled a little when the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) twitted the ministers for having gone to Washington and having lost their hat there, let alone anything else, and then offered to join the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) in another pilgrimage to Washington, this time to the U.S. President himself. I object to any of these begging pilgrimages to Washington. Canada is not a banana republic.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Lewis: We can face a president and an administration of the United States with some considerable strength. There is just as much that the United States needs from Canada as Canada needs from the United States.

The Minister, I think looking at me, twitted me for having said that we should be tougher and take retaliatory steps. I want to tell the minister and the government that the Canadian people are not dumb, and that if the minister's proposals have any effect at all they are a retaliatory step. If the minister's grants are going to result in the production of goods which continue to be exported to the United States, it will only be because his grants would permit a reduction in the price of those goods to offset the 10 per cent surtax. So far as I am concerned if the minister is sending goods to the United States by reducing the price then he is doing the right thing, but is retaliatory because it undoes what President Nixon wants to do, which is to keep our exports out of the United States. So, the minister need not be so self-righteous about this retaliatory business.

No matter what steps one takes to protect the Canadian economy and Canadian jobs, they necessarily involve retaliating against what President Nixon has done unilaterally. I say that a country as powerful as the United States, a country whose economy has such a tremendous effect on the entire world, has no right to undertake without consultation monetary and other actions which adversely affect the rest of the western economy. If President Nixon found it necessary for the protection of his country's interests to ignore the effect of his actions on the rest of the western world then the government of this country ought to have the guts and the concern for the people of Canada to be ready to take whatever steps are necessary to protect Canadian industry and Canadian jobs.

The minister has attempted to create—I suppose that was the objective—a spirit of crisis on this thing by reading us the report from his department. Mr. Speaker, I hope that I got the figures correctly. As a result of consulting industry, his department came to the conclusion that there would be a loss of 40,000 jobs if the surtax lasts three months—I hope the minister corrects me if I did not get the figures right—70,000 jobs if it lasts six months and 90,000 jobs if it lasts a year. If that is true—and I have no way of knowing—I do not necessarily accept those figures as gospel, and neither does the minister. He emphasized the fact that they were not scientific and he even had the honesty, for which I respect him as I always have, to inform us that when you ask a manufacturer "What is going to be the effect on your business" it is like asking the farmer "How are things going"? They both want to know who is asking. Since the manufacturer knows that something is in the wind that might assist him, he may give figures that are or are not accurate.

The minister shrugs his shoulders. So do I, with less Gallic effect but with equal emphasis. But if he is right, if the loss is going to be 40,000 jobs in the first three months, then I say that what he has proposed is absolutely scandalous because \$80 million will not save 40,000 jobs, and he knows it. He knows that this \$80 million, which is the amount specified for the next six months, roughly up to the end of the fiscal year, even if it were all spent in the