

Foreign Economic Boycotts

● (1720)

My own view is that we should proceed something along this line: we should respect the human rights of Canadians in this matter. I would prefer to see a bill in which there is no reference at all to any particular ethnic group. In other words, I do not want to see a statute on our books which refers to Arabs, Jews or any other racial group. I think it would be wrong. I think we should look at it in this sense: we should prefer to see a prohibition on the transmission of any information regarding a Canadian citizen's racial origin, religion, political affiliation or the racial origin, religion or political affiliation of any Canadian director, employee or officer of any company.

I would like to see this prohibition put into any legislation dealing with trade and commerce. In other words, in a commercial transaction between a Canadian company and a company outside Canada there should be a prohibition in Canadian law against any mention whatsoever of an individual's race, religion, political affiliation or anything of that nature. If we leave it as open as that, that would pretty well cover the situation.

We recognize that a state of war exists, theoretically, between Syria and Israel, Iraq and Israel and some other Arab countries and Israel. That is a fact, we recognize it, and they have a right to say who they do business with. If they do not want to do business with a certain nation, they have a right to a primary boycott. They have a right to say which shipping lines come into their ports. They have a right to be suspicious of a shipping vessel which stops at a port of their theoretical enemy, and they have a right not to allow that ship to go from the port of their enemy to their own port without serious restrictions. However, beyond that we should prefer to see the whole matter as free and open as possible, because commerce finds a way to handle these matters. I think that if we leave it there we will be able to serve Canada best.

I am upset when I read reports about what is going on in the Middle East. I think some of the statements made in Canada by people who are not very well informed on events in the Middle East tend to inflame the situation. Constantly keeping the matter in the headlines works against a solution. I am a great believer in quiet diplomacy. I have a great respect for people of the calibre of Mr. Stanfield. I know he has a great and deep feeling about the difficulties in the Middle East, and I know he will bring in a report which is detailed and comprehensive. It will be something upon which we will be able to base some solid and meaningful legislation which will be fair to all concerned.

This subject is charged with emotion, and I think we reach a time in these things when we have to cool our feelings, sit back and look at them calmly and coolly and listen to the wisdom of those who have been there, gathered details and listened to the wisdom of our embassy people and our trade people. Only then should we put together and bring forward a piece of legislation which would help us deal with this problem as we go down the road.

[Mr. Kempling.]

I do not think we are going to solve the problem totally. There will always be some people inside and outside Canada who disagree with what we do. I note that many states of the United States have brought forward anti-boycott legislation. The United States has brought forward anti-boycott legislation. We could rush into this right now, but perhaps after we have read the report which will be made by Mr. Stanfield we will wish we had let matters rest for a few more months.

This matter has been on the table for a long time. It was on the table for the previous government for a long time, and we urged several times that it be brought forward. We talked about it very seriously in our caucus. I think the hon. member will agree that we really should wait and hear what Mr. Stanfield has to say. I do not think that waiting for another 90 days or 120 days will be too difficult for us. I know the Prime Minister is greatly concerned about this matter. Several of my colleagues have expressed their concerns several times. I know that the Minister of State for International Trade (Mr. Wilson) is very concerned about potential losses of trade in the Middle East.

I talked with our trade people in Iraq, in Syria and in Egypt about the boycott, and they all told me more or less the same story. They said that every time the subject of boycott legislation is raised in the House of Commons, whatever trade negotiations are going on between Canadian companies and companies in the Middle East come to a standstill. In other words, the fact that we are even thinking of introducing boycott legislation causes many deals just to stop. The fact that we are talking about this causes a slowdown in negotiations or causes them to be stalled. It was two years ago now, but when I was in Iraq I believe there was a contract being negotiated for aircraft refuelling equipment and tanks in a system. One of the members of the government of the day, the hon. member for Windsor West (Mr. Gray), asked a question about when the government was going to introduce anti-boycott legislation. He also asked a supplementary. At the time I was told that two days later there was knowledge of the question in Iraq, and the deal which was being worked on came to a halt. The parties were ready to sign a contract but they came in and said "It's all off".

The whole matter of legislation and its introduction is being used as a tactic in commercial negotiations, and that is a tragedy in itself. I think the wise position would be to wait for the report of Mr. Stanfield.

Mr. Prud'homme: An ambassador extraordinaire.

Mr. Kempling: My colleague says he is an ambassador extraordinaire. I have a great deal of confidence in him, and I know he is going to make a report on which we can draft some meaningful legislation. That is all I have to say about it. I commend the hon. member for bringing it forward. I just wish it had been a little further down the list so that perhaps we could have got together with him on it and made some changes. But such is the way the draw is made. He has come forward with it at this time and, while we have sympathy for