

Canada—U.S. Automotive Agreement

Taking into account the weight of an opinion expressed by a former minister of finance, I think we are right on this side in asking for a very careful examination of the operation of this agreement. I am surprised that the Minister of Industry (Mr. Drury) did not accede to the request put forward yesterday that the agreement should be referred to a committee. Why would he resist such a suggestion? I would draw the attention of the house to the intense interest which was shown by hon. members when the automobile industry was discussed last session. That interest is still evident. The industry we are considering is one of the great industries of Canada. We all want it to be strong and flourishing. We all want to see the development of the automobile industry in Canada. We would like a great number of highly skilled Canadians to be involved in it. We would like to see our exports of automobiles increase. We would like to see the development of parts manufacturing in Canada. We would like to see a reduction in the cost of automobiles to the consuming public.

This being the case and in view of the intense interest taken in the industry, why should there not be a full examination of this subject? We have committees here which could look into the matter and hear evidence not only from officials of the government but from representatives of the automobile industry and the public. We could carry out a first class examination of this agreement as well as of the development of the industry in Canada.

The minister would, I think, reject the idea of an examination by a committee, though I am not sure. A motion proposing such an examination was ruled out of order. Possibly he will not object to this proposal. Indeed, he may be the one to suggest it and persuade Mr. Speaker to accept a motion made by him to that effect. If the agreement were dependent upon an immediate settlement of this question the minister might argue: there is no time; we must sign the pact now or the whole arrangement will fall through. That would be a serious argument. But the agreement has been in effect now for a year and a half. It was not brought forward in 1965 for ratification by parliament; it was brought forward a year and a half later. A *fait accompli* has been achieved.

In these circumstances there can be no serious objections to there being a little further delay so as to enable a committee to

[Mr. Churchill.]

make an examination of this agreement. Indeed, the minister himself should be the one to suggest that all these matters might very well be placed before a committee. Let us give him the benefit of the doubt. His ideals with regard to the automotive industry may have been very sound and his actions may have been taken with the best motives in the world. I am not quarrelling with him on that score at all.

● (1:30 p.m.)

On the other hand, the agreement may not have worked out as it was depicted to us in such glowing colours a year ago. If it has not, let us know about it and perhaps the defects can be corrected. Why should we not have a committee to investigate this matter and why did we not have one last year? I doubt that there is anything more disturbing than what happened last year when we had to get our information about this agreement second hand from Congressional investigations in the United States. That is the wrong way to go about things. Yesterday the hon. member for Danforth (Mr. Scott) drew our attention to this when he said, as recorded at page 4764 of *Hansard*:

As a matter of fact we obtained most of our information from the hearings in Washington. Incidentally, it has always been embarrassing to me as a member of the House of Commons that we have to rely on the senators in Washington to snap their fingers and get the detailed information which we wanted from our own government in Canada but could not get.

I recall the questions put and the answers given in this house last year on that very subject of information coming out of Washington through a Congressional committee about a matter upon which we could not get information here and yet it was just as important to us as to anybody in the United States. Now, a year and a half later, I suggest to the minister we still have an opportunity to appoint a committee, if you like a joint committee of the Senate and the House of Commons, to investigate the automotive industry and this agreement in order to see whether the agreement is really operating as it should or should be modified. If it is found that it should be modified the matter should then be taken up with the United States.

Another reason can be advanced for appointing a committee of inquiry at the present time. I understand this agreement runs for three years.

Mr. Drury: No, unlimited duration.