

Employment Support Bill

producers. These steps will be taken in parallel with other measures which are presently before the House.

Mr. Speaker: Orders of the day.

Mr. Thomson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, it has occurred to me that the sound system is not working very well yet and I wonder what will be done about it.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: I am not sure Mr. Speaker heard me.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I had difficulty hearing the hon. member. I think I can only reiterate to the hon. member and to the House that there have been mechanical and technological difficulties in connection with the new system. I am assured that it will work well eventually but we must try the patience of hon. members for a few more days. It is hoped that before the weekend all the "bugs" will have been removed from the system.

Mr. Winch: Mr. Speaker, does the term "eventually" have the same meaning that it has when cabinet ministers use it?

Mr. Speaker: Orders of the day.

• (3:10 p.m.)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT BILL

MEASURE TO MITIGATE EFFECT ON CANADIAN INDUSTRY OF IMPOSITION OF FOREIGN IMPORT SURTAXES

The House resumed from Wednesday, September 8, consideration of the motion of Mr. Pepin that Bill C-262, to support employment in Canada by mitigating the disruptive effect on Canadian industry of the imposition of foreign import surtaxes or other actions of a like effect, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs, and the amendment thereto of Mr. Saltsman (page 7633).

Mr. Ian Wahn (St. Paul's): Mr. Speaker, I had just begun to speak on Bill C-262 when the House adjourned yesterday. I should like to deal now with some of the arguments made during the debate by members of the opposition.

I believe it was the former leader of the official opposition, the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker), who used to insist so often that it was the duty of the opposition to oppose. It is clear from the debate that in carrying out this duty the opposition has had to reach down quite far—indeed, to the very bottom of the barrel—for some of its arguments in opposition to this legislation and, indeed, on occasion to show a great deal of imagination. In the few minutes I will take this afternoon I should like to deal with a few of the more startling examples of that exercise in imagination.

All members of the House will agree that the United States surcharge could have a very serious effect on

[Mr. Lang.]

employment in Canada. They will also agree that some legislative action is required. Taking off from this point in an impressive logical leap, opposition members then claim that by introducing this particular bill we are trying in some way to excuse ourselves and to persuade the Canadian people that the United States surcharge is the cause of the degree of unemployment which existed in Canada before the surcharge was imposed. What an exercise in persuasion that would be! And what a high opinion members of the opposition must have of the eloquence of government members on this side of the House.

Mr. Stanfield: Who needs enemies when you have friends like that?

Mr. Wahn: No, Mr. Speaker, in introducing this legislation we are not trying to blame the United States for the degree of unemployment which existed before the United States surcharge was imposed. We are introducing this legislation to prevent the United States surcharge from making our position any worse.

During the debate, members of the opposition also had some pretty harsh things to say because members of the government acted promptly in protesting to Washington against the imposition of the surcharge against Canada and because they asked for an exemption. By far the favourite metaphor—perhaps because it was originally used by the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Stanfield)—was that our ministers went "hat in hand". Other opposition members were somewhat harsher. They said that our ministers went "begging" or "went to grovel at the feet of the Americans". I ask members of the opposition this: in view of the exceptionally serious effect of the surcharge on Canada, admitted by all parties, what would they have said if members of the government had not protested promptly, if they had not pointed out to United States officials why this surcharge should not be imposed against Canada and if they had not asked for an exemption?

Admittedly, the United States action in imposing the surcharge was radical, particularly since that action was taken without consultation with that country's principal trading partners. However, even if we resent this action deeply, does it follow that we should retaliate and risk the danger of a trade war with the United States?

Our population is a little over 20 million people; their population is well over 200 million. More important, as the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) pointed out, our trade with the United States is about one ninth of our gross national product. The United States trade with us is about one thousandth of their gross national product. Surely, it is clear that if we retaliate and get involved in a trade war with the United States, our country will be the loser. Clearly, then, we must suppress our indignation. We must not retaliate. Instead, we must ask ourselves this question: how can we protect Canada against the effect of the surcharge while avoiding the danger of a trade war with the United States? This bill now before us is the government's answer to that question.

This legislation provides an \$80 million fund to compensate industries which will have to pay the surcharge, provided they maintain employment and carry out the conditions set out in the legislation and in the regulations made under it. The solution may not be perfect, but it