

Mr. HOWDEN: What was the value of our imports last year?

Mr. RHODES: Our imports last year amounted to \$439,000, of which \$173,000 came from the United Kingdom, and \$263,000 from the United States.

Mr. HOWDEN: Were representations made to the Canadian government by Canadian firms with regard to this item?

Mr. RHODES: No, there were no requests from Canadian manufacturers with respect to this item. It was one of those items upon which the British government laid particular stress, and I am advised that Great Britain is in a position to supply many times the demand in Canada.

Mr. HOWDEN: The reason I ask is this: The cost of this commodity is excessive at all times, and the practice of the government on a number of items such as this has been to remove the duty altogether from the commodity coming from Great Britain, and to leave the intermediate and general rates as they were. I was wondering if that could not have been done in this instance. The action here taken is bound to increase the cost of this commodity to Canadians, and we can very well do with a cheaper article.

Mr. STEVENS: Carried.

Mr. CASGRAIN: Wait a minute.

Mr. RHODES: If my hon. friend asked a question I am afraid I did not hear it.

Mr. HOWDEN: I was wondering if the government could not take the action in connection with this particular item that they have taken concerning others, that is to say, remove the duty on the English article altogether. A few minutes ago the minister said that this was one article in connection with which the British delegation was most definite. It would have been well for the Canadian people, and probably the British delegation would have been pleased, if the duty had been removed altogether. The minister has said no representations were made by Canadian firms, therefore I see nothing to prevent a removal of the British preferential rate.

Mr. RHODES: When I made the statement to which the hon. member refers, I was replying to the hon. member for Weyburn concerning another matter. So far as I know, no representations were made by Canadian manufacturers, but it was felt that, having [Mr. Rhodes.]

due regard to Canadian manufacturers, we could do nothing less than preserve the existing preferential rate.

Mr. HOWDEN: If no objections were made by Canadian manufacturers it seems to me that even yet, the matter might well be considered, and the Canadian people given the advantage of a lower rate on this item.

Mr. SPEAKMAN: I find myself very much in accord with the hon. member who has just spoken. A commodity of this kind should be sold as cheaply as possible. In this instance the consumer is the one who is suffering, who is called upon to pay hospital bills, and in my view his interests should come before those of the manufacturer. Where the duty against Great Britain has not been changed, but that against competitors increased, there can be no doubt that some slight increase in price will be the result. I should have been delighted to see the preference given to Great Britain by a reduction of tariffs against Great Britain, the other rates remaining as they were. Medical and surgical supplies, above all other things, even the commodities used by farmers, should be allowed to come in as cheaply as possible. The people who require them are those who have been put to exceptional expense at a time when they cannot earn money, and their needs should come before those of the manufacturers. I am prepared to go so far as to place their interests ahead of those of the farmers. They stand in a class by themselves, and should be protected at all costs.

Mr. RHODES: I believe the hon. members for St. Boniface and Red Deer are labouring under the misapprehension that in this item we are increasing the cost of surgical dressings and hospital supplies. My hon. friends are mistaken in that assumption.

Mr. MACKENZIE (Vancouver): Will the minister give an assurance to that effect?

Mr. CASGRAIN: What is there to show that the prices will not be increased?

Mr. RHODES: The bulk of dressings which come under this item are used for entirely different purposes than in hospitals. Representations have been made to me in connection with other phases of the tariff by deputations representative of medical and hospital interests, but I have had no expressions of disapproval of the action of the government with respect to this item.

Mr. SPEAKMAN: Some of the dressings may have no relation to hospital work, but