

Customs Tariff

We must face facts, however. We should concentrate on growing those products which are suited to our climatic conditions and in which we have proved our efficiency. This bill will help us accomplish that although, of course, not to the degree that will satisfy everyone.

Mr. Roy (Laval): Gene Whelan's bill.

Mr. Whelan: Humility just about overcomes me, Mr. Speaker, because my hon. friend said, "That's the Gene Whelan bill."

Mr. Peters: It sounds like one.

Mr. Whelan: It may be said that the bill does not provide enough protection for those vegetables that require a great deal of hand labour. The hon. member who spoke before me talked about having some kind of immediate surcharge or border control that could be activated if damage is about to be sustained by producers of a certain commodity and cheap imports are going to destroy their return. This is one of the things that was recommended in the tariff negotiations and it was expected that an agreement could be worked out.

The Minister of Agriculture, who is not present in the House, issued a press release about the changes in the implementation of an import surtax. The Canadian horticultural industry and the tariff board made a recommendation that an automatic surtax should be applied to imports of horticultural products as they cross the border, if the cost fell below a "trigger" price based on an average of the previous three-year f.o.b. import prices. That is not what we got, Mr. Speaker. We have something that can take as long as 20 days to implement. That is not what I had suggested and it is not what I thought would be brought forth in this House by the minister. He comes from an area that is involved in all kinds of production. When you consider the kind of consultation that has to take place before the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce can implement that surtax, you can see that it is going to be too late to be of any benefit.

The Minister of Agriculture is one of the key ministers in this matter, but if he should happen to be out of the country there is nothing in the bill, that I can find, that provides for action to be taken in his absence. It appears to me that nothing can be done if these products are coming into Canada while he is out of the country—unless they find him so that he can issue an order, and then they go through this consultation process. That is a bunch of bureaucratic nonsense. Hardly another country in the world that would allow that. I fought against that same thing and I was so sure that we would be successful. I am so disappointed that we have something that will take as long as 20 days.

● (2030)

Some Canadian products have only 20 or 30 days' production. It takes 20 days to put in an order. My God, Mr. Speaker, it will be too late. Destruction will take place and you then discourage production of that kind of a crop. Anyone who knows about high risk crops will understand that. Talk about

[Mr. Whelan.]

the amount of money involved! The Minister of Finance (Mr. Crosbie) is not here. There is one minister here, the Minister of National Defence (Mr. McKinnon). He is going to defend the government's stand on these things. But the Minister of Finance is not here.

Talk about vegetables and things which require a tremendous amount of hand labour. These are the things for which farmers borrow. Over 50 per cent of farmers' total income goes in interest on that kind of borrowing because they need so much capital to operate. From the time they plant seedlings to the time they transplant them, they cultivate them, baby them, harvest them, pack them, and all those things, over 50 per cent of their expenditures go on interest rates and this was when they were below 10 per cent.

I have letters from farmers who are paying 15 ½ per cent and 15 ¾ per cent on greenhouse operations to keep going for this winter's operation. They do not know what will happen to them. They do not know whether they should continue. Some are not, because of the insecurity that exists. The insecurity is still there because the surtax, the program announced by the new Minister of Agriculture is just not satisfactory. It is just not what the horticultural industry asked for. It is not what the over-all industry asked for and it is just not what the former minister intended. He wanted to make sure Canadians had the opportunity to consume Canadian products and wanted to give them the kind of protection and security they needed, so that when they do go to the bank manager—

Mr. Peters: Why wasn't there a trigger mechanism in the bill?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Scott, Victoria-Haliburton): Order, please. I think the hon. member for Essex-Windsor (Mr. Whelan), should carry on.

An hon. Member: Why?

Mr. Whelan: It is up to the government to implement the regulations. But I know what those gals and guys in Industry Trade and Commerce think about farmers in negotiations. The Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. de Cotret) in the other place answered a question the other day. I can find no place where this has been changed. They were talking about negotiations on quotas and chickens coming into Canada. He said that that was the Minister of Agriculture's job. I can find no place where that authority has been vested in the Minister of Agriculture. I can find no place where the Minister of Agriculture went to Washington to negotiate chickens at all. A bunch of bureaucrats went to Washington to do it. Let me tell you when I was Minister of Agriculture they were not allowed to do that.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Whelan: When we went to Washington and the secretary of agriculture for the United States sat across the table, if we did not agree then we went to GATT and let an independent court settle the problem. We did not give away the kitchen with the stove and the cupboards and everything in them. We