

*Textile and Clothing Board Act*

industry, we have clung to the production of many items on sentimental or emotional grounds long after such operations have lost their economic justification.

Under clause 8 of this bill, a person who produces in Canada any textile and clothing goods, or a person or association acting on his behalf, may file a notice of complaint with the board alleging that the importation of the textile and clothing goods described in the notice is causing or threatening serious injury to his production in Canada of any textile and clothing goods. In essence, the board is being established to hear complaints from parties who allege, or even fear, injury from the importation of certain textiles or clothing items. I cannot help but think, Mr. Speaker, that it will be a relatively short time before the board becomes brain-washed into believing that most Canadian textile and clothing manufacturers are encountering serious challenges from overseas sources, and that the issuance of important licences is required in order to eliminate these challenges.

The textile and clothing producers appearing before the board may be able to strengthen their arguments by having their employees' representatives testify regarding the actual or alleged jeopardy in which their jobs are being placed. Being further mindful of the fact that in many of the towns or villages in Ontario and Quebec where textile and clothing companies are located they are the only or major employer, the board will be under extreme pressure to agree to the request for the issuance of an import licence. I am not suggesting that clothing and textile manufacturers and their employees should in any way be impeded in making their position or views known to the board. What does, however, concern me is the lack of regional balance amongst the membership of the board, and the lack of adequate provisions in the bill to ensure that the consumers' interests are going to be as vigorously represented as those of the manufacturers and unions.

• (4:30 p.m.)

The Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Pepin) may believe that the provisions of clause 10 of the bill, whereby the board is required to publish in the Canada Gazette a notice of its intention to hold an inquiry, will afford to all interest parties an adequate opportunity to make representations. However, I think he would agree that while consumers are the largest single interested group in Canada, they are one of the least organized. Moreover, as the hon. member for Coast Chilcotin (Mr. St. Pierre) observed during a committee hearing, the Canada Gazette is such an obscure publication that the death of kings may be buried in it without one being the wiser.

The very limited extent to which Canadian consumers are organized was clearly brought out before the committee studying this bill when it heard representatives from the Consumers Association of Canada, the only nationally organized consumer group in Canada. The Association has 65,000 members and a professional staff of only five workers. When one considers the many other consumer interests which the association must serve, I think it becomes readily apparent that the Canadian consumer is

[Mr. Yewchuk.]

going to be at an enormous disadvantage in presenting his case before the textile and clothing board in comparison with the industry and its employees, who in themselves number almost 200,000.

The Economic Council of Canada has documented rather dramatically what a high percentage of our population lives below the poverty line. In addition, hundred of thousands of our people live on net salaries which are not a great deal above the poverty line. My concern is that measures which serve to increase artificially and unnecessarily the costs of clothing items for people in these income brackets—and they are the ones who will be most affected by restrictions against inexpensive clothing from overseas—are directed against those people who are least able to afford increased costs and who are least able to make the kind of organized representations against increased costs that will be made in favour of them.

Perhaps even more fundamental to this whole issue than anything else is the question, "Why is a board necessary?" Why cannot the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce assist the rationalization of the industry from within the framework of his department instead of creating a new agency, which by his own admission will in any event be heavily dependent upon the human resources of his department? I have followed the debate and study of this bill as closely as any member, I think, yet I cannot see any clear, overriding advantage for the creation of a textile and clothing board, whereas I can see a number of distinct disadvantages against its formal creation.

The very existence of such a board cannot but raise fears that, starting with the textile industry, which is certainly not one of our weaker industries, Canada is embarking on preparations for restrictive trade barriers at the very time when there is so much uneasiness in international trade quarters that the European Common Market and the United States are headed for a trade war which could have the most drastic consequences for us if we become caught, as is likely, in a squeeze play between these two giant trading blocks. Owing to the indifference towards our traditional ties with Great Britain shown by successive Liberal governments, Canada can no longer expect that its markets in the United Kingdom will remain when the British government is finally accepted into the European Common Market. The United States and Japan are having serious difficulties in arriving at mutually acceptable positions regarding trade in clothing and textiles. With growing unemployment in Canada and the United States, it is easy for us to fall into the dangerous trap of hoping that by keeping out foreign competition we will ease the level of unemployment. I think that one does not need to look too far to see that overprotectionism can bring retaliation from other countries and may result in the possibility of the collapse of international trade as each nation seeks to protect itself more and more.

The presence of the board will help to encourage the opinion that a certain percentage of the Canadian market—it appears to be 60 per cent—belongs almost as a birthright to Canadian manufacturers. Indeed, this posi-