

Customs Tariff

this bill at all. There will be opportunities later in the session, if the hon. gentleman wishes to raise the question, when that matter can be discussed. These questions certainly do not relate to the bill now before the house.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): This bill may not cover matters that would provide for remedial action, but it certainly is open to the minister or anyone else to re-examine the bill in the light of anything that is not covered and which might, if made applicable to a particular situation, be brought within the context of the measure before the house. However, I take it from the minister's reply that he is not in a position at the moment to make a report about a matter as important as this.

Mr. Benidickson: Mr. Speaker, I was rather disappointed that, in view of the many important negotiations that have taken place and are taking place which have a decided effect on our customs tariff, the minister did not take this opportunity to expand a bit about some of the items dealt with in the resolutions that were introduced on budget night, March 31.

The minister then indicated that we had ahead of us a very important conference in connection with our GATT trade agreements which would be initiated this fall and perhaps carry on for several months. In view of the fact that a good part of the amendments proposed in the bill relate to our GATT trade agreements, the minister should take the house and the country more into his confidence at this time. There was a discussion last week about the publicized offer of the United States government with respect to proposals it would make when the GATT conference convenes this autumn. We were particularly interested, of course, in those items which represent major matters of trade between Canada and the United States.

In that connection the United States government has advanced at this time what is called an "offer". I think the offer we have heard about should have been disclosed to the house. We were told rather abruptly that if it was something that was published in United States newspapers, members of parliament could look to those newspapers for information in this regard. However, as we are discussing a number of changes in the existing tariff schedules under the Customs Tariff Act, some of which may be affected by the negotiations next fall, I think before concluding the debate the minister should take us more into his confidence as to the present status of negotiations between Canada and the United States, the nation with which we principally trade.

With respect to the proposed changes before us, the minister has indicated that four of the resolutions which preceded the bill related to textile items. I think I am correct in saying that those items, with very minor exceptions, were dealt with by the tariff board, or shall I say that with minor exceptions the proposals put before us represent recommendations of the tariff board which has recently examined the textile tariff schedules. Because, as recommended by the tariff board, an increase in duties was involved, and because of the fact that some of these items were bound under our GATT trading agreement, it was necessary for the government to negotiate with the signatories to the GATT agreement who were affected by the proposed changes. In consequence, the minister indicated that about a score of items in the schedule to the bill involve a reduction in tariff duty because of the trading that took place with the principal suppliers of these commodities after the government reached the decision to increase some of the textile tariff import duties.

The minister indicated that some other reports with respect to textiles were momentarily expected from the tariff board. I think he referred to hosiery and knitted goods, and to woollen clothing. Certain other items were referred to on budget night as being under study by the tariff board, and the minister expected that reports thereon would be received soon. I hope that before closing the debate the minister will bring us up to date as to the studies that are under way.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): If my hon. friend will permit, I can say to him at once that there is nothing further to report since I made my statement on budget night.

Mr. Benidickson: Would the minister indicate later how soon he expects the reports of the tariff board on hosiery and knitted goods, woollen clothing and associated items and the others will be brought down? I take it that in many instances the items involved are bound under our GATT trading arrangements and would require negotiation with other countries before the minister could recommend changes in the tariff schedule to the house.

I am pleased to find that some of the recommendations of the organized farm community have received the attention of the government and are incorporated in proposed amendments in the schedule to the bill. However, I think the minister will recall that the interprovincial farm union, having in mind the minister's budget, made representations this year with respect to changes in practice that they believed had developed since this new government took office with regard to heavier