

Adjournment Debate

est in raising this subject is twofold. First, we should have very strict testing of body armour made in Canada, and it must be tested by well-qualified people. By the same token, foreign imports should also receive the same stringent test. A product of this nature should not be allowed on the market until it passes such tests. We in Canada are quite capable of supplying our own domestic market as well as foreign markets, but we should put more emphasis on testing and approvals.

Second, this should be part and parcel of standard police equipment. Individual law enforcement officers should not have to pay for their own. Surely we do not have to wait until more tragedies occur, such as the one which started in my constituency and ended in the constituency of the hon. member for Parry Sound-Muskoka (Mr. Darling) just before Christmas, before we apply a serious policy of co-ordination at all levels of government and make every effort to protect and assist our law enforcement officers when carrying out their duties.

● (2215)

I and many others would like to see this happen in all jurisdictions, again in order to help protect those individuals across Canada who try to make Canada a safe place for all to live. I cannot emphasize enough, regardless of whether a peace officer is municipal, provincial or federal, that they are in fact participating in this important aim. I would like to see a sincere effort in co-ordinating this matter with various levels of government and at the same time in ensuring that the vests are of excellent quality and Canadian made.

Mr. John Evans (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, first I commend the hon. member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke (Mr. Hopkins) for his analysis of the situation we face with regard to body armour and the hazards facing our law-enforcement officers. In fact, I would go so far as to say that everything he said tonight was something with which I could agree entirely. The area to which I am able to respond as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance deals specifically with the question of the 25 per cent import duty placed on body armour at the moment under the most-favoured nation customs duty. Indeed, the possibility of removing the customs duty on bulletproof vests for police officers was reviewed very carefully by the Department of Finance in response to a number of requests, not only from the hon. member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, but from users who advanced the argument that the vest is a piece of safety equipment which should be accorded the same duty-free privilege as firemen's safety helmets and industrial helmets.

The investigation of the department revealed that duty free entry for firemen's safety helmets and industrial safety helmets, such as miners' helmets, was established in the late 1920s at a time when these helmets were not produced in Canada. In 1947 Canada entered into a commitment under the general agreement on tariffs and trade not to impose a customs duty on these helmets. On the other hand, bulletproof vests are produced in Canada by at least two companies, one of

which is International Uniforms Limited of Montreal that manufactures several varieties. As the hon. member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke indicated, this company sells these vests not only in Canada but also to outlets in the United States. Currently this company is working very closely with the RCMP to further improve its product so that all the standards to which my hon. friend referred will be met as they should be. The other known producer is Safeco Manufacturing Limited of Scarborough, Ontario. Currently that company is not producing but is in the research phase of developing products which I am sure will meet the standards to which my hon. friend referred.

It is my view that the operations of these two companies would be adversely affected if the duty on body armour vests were removed. I think it is desirable to have this kind of equipment made in Canada to the standards recommended by my hon. friend. Granting tariff protection to Canadian manufacturers will assist in realizing this objective and help manufacturers to expand sales in Canada and abroad.

CANADIAN ARMED FORCES—REPORTED TESTING OF CHEMICAL DEFOLIANTS

Mr. Terry Sargeant (Selkirk-Interlake): Mr. Speaker, on January 23, on January 26 and on January 27 of this year and again today, I asked the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Lamontagne) a series of questions surrounding the matter of the testing of chemical defoliants at Canadian Forces Base Gagetown in June, 1966 by the United States army.

The government's answers to the questions my colleagues and I directed on this matter have served more to cloud the issue than to enlighten those of us who sought answers.

● (2220)

Two fundamental questions arise out of the Gagetown incident. First, what is the nature and extent of Canada's involvement in chemical and biological warfare testing and, second, why have Canadian governments repeatedly denied—and in fact continue to deny to this day—that Canadian chemical research at any defence establishment in this country was for the aid of the American effort in Vietnam?

The credibility of the Department of National Defence is at stake in this matter, and every day that department continues to deny Canada's role in chemical warfare testing only adds to its incredibility. After we discovered that Winnipeggers had been used as guinea pigs in a 1953 test over that city, the Minister of National Defence told us that this was the last revelation, that there were no other instances of open air testing. Well, six months later we learn of the Gagetown tests in which the carcinogenic chemicals, Agents Orange, White, Purple, and Blue, were used. Now that the government has stated categorically that there were no other tests, I am sure we need only wait a few more months for yet another incident of that kind to come to light. Surely Canadians deserve better from their government than this feeble display of excuses following one after the other.