

Adjournment Debate

[Translation]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It being ten o'clock, it is my duty to inform the House that pursuant to the provisions of Standing Order 58(11), the proceedings on the motion of the hon. member for Don Valley (Mr. Gillies) have expired.

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[English]

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate have passed Bill C-25, an Act to protect human health and the environment from substances that contaminate the environment, without amendment.

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[Translation]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 40 deemed to have been moved.

INDUSTRY—FOOTWEAR—REQUEST FOR PROBING OF IMPORTS

Mr. Léonel Beaudoin (Richmond): Mr. Speaker, according to the provisions of the Standing Order, I have raised a question to draw to the attention of the House the serious problems now facing the Canadian footwear industry. I make a new attempt today because I consider on one hand that, as a result of our difficult economic conditions, we must protect our industries and on the other hand, I must tackle more particularly that problem because in my constituency the footwear industry is important, especially the town of Richmond which has several plants. Our regional economy heavily relies on the footwear industry which even provides the subsistence of many families.

It should first be pointed out that it is not a new problem. Already these last few years our industry has been experiencing difficulties and constantly losing ground. For instance on May 3, 1971, on page 10 of *La Presse* one could read the following headline in big letters:

DESPAIR GRIPS FOOTWEAR INDUSTRY

The article contained a statement by Mr. Eugène Rancourt, then president of one of the footwear unions, who said that in the ten preceding years at least 34 plants had gone out of business in Quebec alone, which lead to the layoff of hundreds of workers.

Ottawa was then urged to limit imports to a reasonable percentage. If I take the trouble of describing the conditions in 1971, it is because they are strangely similar to the ones we have now, which means that practically the problem has not really been solved and has even worsened.

[Mr. McKenzie.]

That is why very recently the Footwear Manufacturers Association of Canada launched a campaign to make the government realize the pressing necessity of intervening as soon as possible with very definite measures to save that important sector of economic activity. It is with this view, Mr. Speaker, that I rise in this House tonight to ask this question.

First of all, I would like to draw the attention of the government, and in particular of the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Jamieson), on the data that must be well established before anything else. As a matter of fact, the history of the footwear industry in Canada since 1956 is merely one of loss of a large market which was most promising. In 1956, Canada imported 12 per cent of the Canadian footwear production while in 1969, imports had reached 79 per cent. In 1956, Canada produced 58.8 million pairs of shoes and imported 6.9 million while in 1969, our production was about 58 million pairs while imports had increased from 6.9 to 46 million.

● (2200)

These figures are self-explanatory. Foreign competition is therefore great and has very serious consequences in Canada. The situation was somewhat better in 1973 for instance, when some 31 million pairs of shoes were imported, but as Mr. Jean-Paul Hanna, the president of the association, indicated at the official opening of the Canadian International Footwear Exhibition in September 1974, even though at first imports seemed to be slowing down, by the end of the year they had recuperated to reach a total net increase of 3.7 per cent.

Already in 1973 the leather industry had asked the government for increased protection against foreign shoe imports. They were afraid the number of imported shoes might reach 41,000,000 pairs, while shoes produced in Canada might fall down to 18,000,000 pairs.

In its brief to the government, the association asked for a reduction of imports, so that in 1975, in other words this year, Canadian manufacturers might supply 75 per cent of the shoe market. Now, we see today that this objective is far from being reached. On the contrary, orders for shoes from Quebec and Canadian manufacturers have dropped by 38 per cent at the beginning of this year compared to last year. On that subject, Mr. Jean-Guy Maheu, the vice-chairman of the association said the following:

If this trend were to be maintained throughout the year, 35 plants would have to close.

More than 10 per cent of the labour force have been dismissed since the beginning of the year and many have been dismissed temporarily. I think, Mr. Speaker, that these facts alone are sufficient to sound the alarm, to urge us to give immediate consideration to that problem and prevent an irreparable catastrophe. The Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce tried in 1973 to correct the situation by setting up what he called "his sectorial strategy for the footwear and tanning industry".

In the light of past experience since then, we realize however that, to all practical intents and purposes, that sectorial strategy can be efficient only if we ensure our Canadian production a good Canadian market. One has to be blind not to see that we must first guarantee the survival of our industries by ensuring them a good per-