

Textile and Clothing Board Act

ing with countries that have lower labour costs. The answer to this problem is, of course, to have a higher degree of productivity, which sometimes results only from a greater degree of automation and acceptance of technological change.

I think that society, and certainly governments that take the initiative the minister has taken to rationalize those sections of industry that require rationalization in order to remain viable and vigorous, have in turn an obligation to provide assistance to those workers in labour-intensive industries who are affected by this policy. For this reason, I am very pleased that the minister, in collaboration with me and my department, has seen fit to include in this bill clause 21, which provides financial assistance and a certain degree of security for those workers who can be identified by a formula as members of the textile industry.

I do not intend to prolong the debate, in view of the courtesy and co-operation extended to me by the opposition, by speaking at length on the whole concept of rationalization and the effect it has on the work force, together with the moral obligations imposed on management and on government to help displaced workers. Rather, I shall confine my remarks to clause 21 and explain in a little greater detail in the House, before it is made public through the medium of the press, precisely what aspects can be emphasized at the moment.

I think the minister who has just spoken made it very clear that the end result, the logical conclusion of this policy, would be a more viable, vigorous and competitive textile industry in Canada. This, in turn, will mean not only the survival of the industry but, if his predictions are accurate—and I believe they are—it will mean an expanded textile industry over the next decade, and particularly a competitive one that does not have to depend for its survival entirely on high tariffs. This is in the best interests of the workers as well, of course, as of the country and for the economic picture in Canada.

With these ends in mind, the minister has brought in what I think is a very forward-looking piece of legislation; this is the type of action we should be taking more and more in connection with other industries. We have not ignored the fact, however, that these beneficial changes could and might result in some disruptive effect, even of a temporary nature, on those people presently employed in the textile industry, which as I have mentioned in some parts of the country tends to be very labour-intensive.

Clause 21 provides that, in order to keep any adverse effects of unemployment to a minimum, there will be a special program of benefits to those assisted workers affected by the bill and who have to cope with the problems of adjustment. In coming to this decision the government has been very conscious of the fact that many workers employed in the textile and clothing industry are over 50 years of age and are located in many instances in small centres where employment opportunities are limited. These are workers who possess skills which are not readily adapted to other work because of their long association with the textile industry.

• (12:10 p.m.)

I should like to outline very briefly some of the features of this program. Perhaps I should just read the clause of the bill in order to explain more fully what we intend to do. Clause 21 provides that any producer of textiles and clothing, or any trade union representing the workers of that industry, or any representative group of non-organized workers where unions do not exist, may apply to the Textile and Clothing Board for certification in respect of a lay-off of significant size and duration that can be directly attributed to one of several causes.

One cause, for instance, is the reduction of tariffs on any textiles or clothing goods imported into Canada which could cause temporary unemployment in a transitional period, or any condition set up by the government for special protection, or any case of serious injury or threat to the production of any textile or clothing goods as a result of import competition in circumstances where special measures of protection have not been recommended and not deemed practicable. This is the area which could only survive with particularly high tariffs.

Workers affected by lay-offs and certified by the board will be entitled to apply as individuals for specific benefits, the details of which will be covered by regulations now being prepared by the department. These regulations will be made under the authority of the provisions of Appropriation Act No. 4, which was approved by the House on December 15 and received Royal Assent on December 18, 1970. Provisions for the fund were made in the supplementary estimates of the Department for 1970-71.

The adjustment assistance program will provide for two types of benefits. The first is a supplementary benefit which will apply to all people who are associated with the textile industry regardless of age; that is for those workers regardless of age who are in receipt of unemployment insurance benefits as a result of lay-offs. Where lay-offs may occur that have a clearly established attachment to the industry there will be supplementary benefits which, when added to the benefits available under the present unemployment insurance system, will provide for a total benefit to a maximum of \$100 per week, or two-thirds of the previous income from employment in the industry. Subject to transitional arrangements, these benefits will be payable only until such time as the benefit provisions of the new unemployment insurance act comes into force. This simply means that if there are some applications approved which result in this type of dislocation before the new Unemployment Insurance Act comes into effect, then the provisions of the new act will apply immediately, as of tomorrow theoretically, through the payment of supplementary unemployment insurance benefits to bring the benefits up to the level we propose under the new plan. When the new plan comes into effect, these people will fall within the new plan and the supplementary unemployment benefits will be eliminated.

Perhaps the more important feature of the plan that we propose for those workers who are over 54 years of age at the date of lay-off is that there will be a pre-