

Customs Tariff

negotiations. Many of our small industrial and agricultural areas are affected by changes, modifications, and upgrading of GATT agreements.

I am pleased to see the former minister of agriculture here tonight as one of the problems we have experienced over the years has been the result of the Department of Agriculture trying to defend and protect fruit producers, vegetable producers, and the producers of many other agricultural products, while at the same time attempting to ensure a supply of these products to the consumer at reasonable prices and to promote the entry of those products into other markets. This situation has been affected by tariffs, and by the very limited role the Department of Agriculture has been able to play in deciding when tariffs should apply.

Many producers have felt that the application of controls has not been fast enough to provide even minimum protection for the industry. If that is not true, then how can we explain the fact that we have lost many of our markets for Canadian agricultural products? We have lost most of our fruit markets. I suppose Niagara Falls will soon be remembered only as a honeymoon centre rather than a fruit growing area. That may now be the case, except for the fact that a few wine companies are still hanging on despite great difficulties in that industry.

Not long ago one could go into a store and buy a crate of Canadian grapes or a barrel of apples at a reasonable price. Today most people cannot afford to buy fruit in that quantity. It has been claimed that the high cost of these fruits and vegetables is directly related to the high cost of picking the fruit and harvesting the vegetables. I do not think that is any more expensive in Canada than in the United States.

One problem that we have faced is the shortage of volume to supply canneries. I cannot speak in detail about the situation in the Niagara peninsula and the loss of canneries in that area, but I am aware of the situation in my own area of northern Ontario which is not too well known for its production of vegetables. On probably three or four occasions we have been the world potato king. We have held on a number of occasions the Pea King award. We have received awards for several other vegetables, including turnips, which now have a new name.

● (2010)

Mr. Whelan: Rutabaga.

Mr. Peters: Yes, rutabagas or something. At one time in my area, the little clay belt, we had a canning factory which canned peas. Those peas were under the label of Northern Pride, Wabi Valley and several other names. They were produced for two or three of the large chain stores as well. It was a very good industry for the farmers in the area and was owned by a very small company. This company got an offer from Canada Packers, and Canada Packers did the same thing as these packing companies have done all over the country; they bought the factory, operated it for one year, and then closed it down. Now no peas are canned in the little clay belt. This has happened with peaches, pears, apple sauce, cherries,

[Mr. Peters.]

and many other commodities. They are being bought out in Canada, and instead of the tariff structure allowing a steady inflow over a long period of time, the only fodder available for the canning factories in this country appears to be only in areas where the large bulk of that produce is grown.

The minister indicated that the reason for those limitations in this bill is to alleviate this problem so that we would be able to extend our season through imports. The majority of our products would be under tariff, and when we were finished our producing season then we could import, which would meet the needs of the canning industry. Unfortunately, this does not happen. If I go into a store and buy jam, I probably buy jam packaged in the United States. Some Tory members would tell me it is probably because of the cost of picking the fruit. I do not think that the wages for fruit pickers are higher in Canada than in the United States, so it must be something else.

I would not hesitate to pay a few cents more to buy jam, a car, or anything else that was made in Canada. I once thought that I had purchased a car made in Canada because it had the word Canadian written on the side, but it turned out not to be a Canadian car at all. These tariff adjustments probably will not produce the outcome which Canadians anticipate. It has been suggested that we need free trade. I am all for it because it is great for selling gold, lumber, iron pellets, and many other things which we produce. It is great for selling grain, grass seed, and other commodities, but it is not great for the guy who manufactures cars, or the farmer in the country who is located a number of degrees north of his competitors and who experiences a longer growing season. That is the reason for tariffs.

If we have to use tariffs, surely the government can be fair to the members of Parliament and explain to them the tariff regulations involved in this bill. There are pages of numbers and general changes. They do not show where the numbers came from, what they apply to, what they affect, nor show in any way why there should be a change or where preferential treatment should be increased or decreased. It is all very well when the government has a majority for it to ram through ways and means measures every time it wants more money or it wants to change the tariff structure, but it seems to me that in a minority government it behooves all members to participate. The explanation given for this bill is:

This bill would implement the ways and means motions relating to the Customs Tariff that were tabled by the Minister of Finance on October 23, 1979.

That does very little to explain all the appendages to this bill which include such areas as medicine, aircraft engines, coffee, electricity, steel, soap, gelatine and so on. It goes on for two pages talking about one very simple commodity. I thought that sugar was sugar, but there are two pages on the different kinds of sugar. I suppose that we have learned something about the degrees of good and bad sugar, but the form in which this bill is presented is not sufficient to explain and justify the passage of tariff or customs legislation.

I have mentioned that the bill also amends the New Zealand trade agreement of 1932, the South African trade agreement