

a STITCH in TIME

**Who could
have predicted
five short years ago
that fashion buyers
would "discover" Canada,
sparking a boom
in the clothing industry?
From \$27 million
in 1967,
Canada increased
apparel exports
to \$93 million in 1972
and moved within
striking distance
of replacing Italy
as the leading supplier
of quality
ready-to-wear
to the United States,
the most lucrative
mass market
in the world.**

How did Canada make it from rags to riches? A serious threat to struggling apparel manufacturers developed during the 1960s when Canada was inundated with low-cost garments from developing countries on the one hand, and better-quality clothing from U.S. giants on the other. While quality of Canadian and U.S. clothing was on a par, their large-scale production methods gave U.S. manufacturers an edge in pricing. Canadian manufacturers faced two further disadvantages. To streamline production costs, U.S. firms increased the volume of certain lines to unprecedented quantities and reduced the number of lines they offered. While this worked well in their market of 200,000,000 people, it posed a problem for Canadian manufacturers. Canada's market of 21,000,000 people could absorb only short runs and to survive, manufacturers had to offer variety.

But Canadians had one point in their favour—the flexibility of their industry. In their race to achieve maximum efficiency, U.S. plants sacrificed not only variety but also the ability to respond quickly to sudden changes in fashion tastes. Canadians, meanwhile, were busily developing their own designing talents and upgrading standards of quality.

At the end of the last decade, it all came together for Canada. In the U.S., consumers rebelled against the limited choice of styling and unleashed an international fashion explosion. In Europe, even leading haute couture houses branched out into ready-to-wear, and emphasis started swinging from tailor-made to mass-produced clothing. Suddenly there was a huge market potential for quality clothing with a wide range of styling, and Canadian manufacturers found themselves uniquely equipped to deal with it. At least, they had the in-plant capabilities. With limited export experience, could

they market their capabilities successfully?

The United States accounts for 70 per cent of the recent rise in Canadian exports—that is where Canada has concentrated its fashion drive. Most of the increase has also been earned by women's wear, which constituted the major part of the export effort. Canadian manufacturers staged their first fashion fair in New York in November, 1968. It was part of a program sponsored by the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce calling for four showings a year—spring and summer collections in November and January, and fall and winter wear in April and June.

The November and April showings are previews for New York resident buyers of department, chain and specialty stores. Buyers from all parts of the U. S. and from Europe attend the January and June showings that are timed to coincide with established market weeks. Seventeen manufacturers and 600 styles of ladies' rainwear appeared in the first show in 1968. It was the largest rainwear exhibition ever held in New York and attracted 110 buyers representing 10,000 stores, among them 12 of the largest retailers in the United States. The target was \$5,000,000. With re-orders after the January showing, sales reached \$800,000. By the end of 1971, the New York showings included ladies' coats, suits, sportswear, dresses, hosiery, lingerie, loungewear and sleepwear and attracted close to 1,000 buyers.

Impetus was added by two men's wear showings in New York and Philadelphia. Individual U.S. buyers were invited to tour Canadian showrooms intermittently through the year, and annual three-day exhibitions of ladies' and children's wear were held in Montreal. Five hundred U.S. buyers who attended a Montreal showing by 78 manufacturers in the spring of 1972 placed