

*Textile and Clothing Board Act*

member for Coast-Chilcotin (Mr. St. Pierre), as reported at page 15:17, put this question:

Would you permit a supplementary here? Is there any provision in this bill which obliges the board to make public the fact that it is about to give consideration to a matter and is there any provision for it to advertise its hearings so that interested parties may attend?

In other words, the hon. member is really posing two questions. Firstly, he wants the hearings to be advertised so that interested parties can attend, and he is also asking whether there is any provision that obliges the board to make the facts public. Then, the hon. member for Okanagan Boundary (Mr. Howard) said:

There is provision for the board to make reports. There is one problem in the kind of detailed reports that are made, and that is that much of the information that is gathered is of a private commercial nature.

I am not advocating that reports of a private and confidential nature be published but that published reports be made public; it is as simple as that. Following a similar line of thought, the hon. member for Waterloo (Mr. Saltsman), after a lengthy argument over this concept, as reported at page 21:6 of committee proceedings No. 21 said:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I tend to agree with the argument you make about the board receiving submissions from all interested parties, that the general rule be public hearings for each inquiry and that the decisions and the reasons be made public.

Those are two quotations from Liberal and NDP members. The minister nods his head in approval from time to time. Surely, we can reach a consensus on the issue that decisions of boards appointed by the government should, wherever possible, be made public, particularly in a touchy situation where, in effect, you are deciding that some industries shall survive and others shall die. Some industries need protection, and as I say that protection may well affect the export of other goods, particularly when protection is continually being asked for against goods brought in from what I might call the low cost producers, the Pacific rim countries that are buying so much of Canada's raw materials.

It may even be the case that tariffs will be raised for short periods. Unless the public is informed of the duration the minister may, even unknowingly, extend the protection for a longer period than the board intended. If the public is informed it can quickly draw to the minister's attention the fact the period recommended by the board has expired. If the minister believes in an informed public, he should accept this amendment.

The acceptance of this amendment would mean that we, as representatives of the people, would know of the board's recommendations and of the action the minister is taking. We could then judge whether those decisions and actions are based on sound recommendations, or whether they are narrow-minded policy decisions that are geared to protecting rather than expanding Canadian markets or to saving sick and ailing industries that the minister says he is not prepared to protect himself. We should be in a position to examine the reports of the board in order to determine whether, in our opinion,

[Mr. Horner.]

these industries are sick and ailing or, rather, viable industries that are capable of forming part of the hub of industries that trade internationally in textiles.

This bill revolves around the principle of greater rationalization in the textile industry. If we are to determine whether the decisions of the minister are based on rationalization rather than protectionism, we must have the reports of the board. These reports must be made public so that we can make a fair and accurate assessment of those reports and the minister's decisions.

**Mr. F. J. Bigg (Pembina):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to add my support for this simple but I think important amendment. Many of the duties of members of Parliament have now been assigned to committees and many of our public and civic responsibilities have been handed over to boards. This is why it seems to me imperative that we know what these boards are doing. Although I realize perfectly well that the final responsibility lies in the executive, it is very difficult for us to tailor the law so we are kept up to date with the multitude of regulations and decisions made by boards without full disclosure of the facts.

Although the committee system is supposed to streamline Parliament, in actual fact it means that a very small number of members of Parliament are intimately connected with many decisions that are made. It is true that the committee system should tend to streamline Parliament, but in the streamlining process I think we are tending to hamstring ourselves. Many times we in the House are told that legislation has passed committee. But the very strength of the parliamentary system lies in the fact that 264 members are able to probe the wisdom of the executive and of government appointed boards. If we had an all-knowing government, an all-knowing civil service and an all-knowing slate of boards, then we would not need a Parliament; but for well over 1000 years our people have found that the only answer to governments is an alert public, and we happen to be the representatives of that alert public.

We want to know on what recommendations decisions of the executive are based. It seems to me that this simple amendment now before the House strikes at the very heart of the democratic process. Although it is a privilege carefully to scrutinize the actions of boards and ministers, and of departments which have stripped us of a great many of our powers, it is impossible for us to keep a finger on everything that is taking place in this country unless reports of government appointed boards are published. These reports are prepared at public expense, often at great public expense, and many times the executive takes action on these reports having less intimate knowledge of the facts than the backbenchers of this House.

● (4:10 p.m.)

Often, the final decision is not ours at all. After a matter has been threshed out in committee and the committee has made its report, some board makes the final decision according to law. I might mention a few exam-