

many amendments have been proposed then rejected by this government. The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson) has never agreed to take into account the views of the opposition. All he wanted was to have the House approve these bills as introduced and they were so flawed that we thought it our duty to delay their passage as long as possible, mainly that of Bill C-197, to help the population and particularly the farmers.

Our attitude in this field has been identical to that we had regarding the White Paper presented, some time ago, by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson). Had we heeded him, we would have passed the legislation sponsored by him as it was, whereas today a joint committee of the Commons and the Senate has adopted a great many of our views on fiscal reform.

Thus, Mr. Speaker, far from seeking to create obstruction, we have had as our sole purpose to see that the people of Canada get the legislation they deserve.

Returning to Bill C-197, Mr. Speaker, when speaking to farmers we realize that those the legislation would most affect know very little about it. Few of them are aware that the council responsible for applying the legislation would be fully government-appointed. The farmers expect that they will have their say in an area which concerns them so closely. In fact, I think that those on the front benches opposite have missed the chance to tell the farmers, for instance, that the Council, entirely appointed by the government, and not elected as we want it to be, would control quotas, marketing, storage, labeling and distribution and would have the right to collect charges from the farmers.

● (8:20 p.m.)

They are completely unaware of that. Ministers should therefore go to the province of Quebec and clearly explain this provision of the law. They would realize that farmers have a lot of objections.

Mr. Speaker, within the few minutes left to me I would like to particularly call the hon. members' attention on the conditions prevailing more especially in my constituency. Needless to say that the city of St. Hyacinthe is considered as a natural centre of culture and regional attractions. Over there, farmers and factory workers are familiar with each other and there is complete agreement between these two groups of our society.

Of course, my riding is affected as much as any other by the general conditions prevailing in Canada at the present time. However, the city of Saint-Hyacinthe being a textile centre, the problems of that particular industry affect especially the workers of my riding.

Mr. Speaker, this is not the first time that I have had occasion to speak about this matter here in the House. Since the present government has been in power, I have taken every opportunity to point out to the responsible minister, and the government as a whole, that some action was urgently required in order to maintain this industry in our area.

Unfortunately, all my requests fell into deaf ears with the result that today our textile workers wonder how long they will be able to keep their jobs.

The Address—Mr. Ricard

The textile industry deserves the attention of this government. It provides work for at least 83,000 people, 47,000 of whom live in the province of Quebec. Its yearly output in my province is estimated at \$850 million. Every year several millions of dollars are invested in equipment and in the construction or renovation of buildings.

In spite of the importance of this industry, this government has waited until it is almost too late to take the necessary action.

We have warned the government, particularly about the field of shirt making, that imports were much too heavy for the Canadian industry to feel at ease. Nothing was done, except after the damage was irreparable. The Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce did take some action, but it was too late. The harm was done.

In St. Hyacinthe, for instance, the Yamaska Shirt which once had 350 employees cut its staff by 75 per cent. In factories such as Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company and Penman's Limited which employed hundreds of workers a few years ago, there are much less now.

As far as the footwear industry is concerned, official statistics show that since 1963, 45 manufacturers have gone out of business. Some industries are getting ready to reduce the number of employees or to close down.

In 1960, there were 249 Canadian plants in the footwear industry, while in 1970, there are only 189 shoe manufacturers in the country. In 1966, there were 25,360 employees while, in 1970, there were only 22,000.

On the other hand, shoe imports in 1956 amounted to 6,898,315 pairs as compared with 46,100,000 pairs in 1969.

Mr. Speaker, I have no objection to the government trading with underdeveloped countries, but I believe our first responsibility is to ensure employment for Canadians before throwing our doors wide open to imports.

Last week I had the opportunity to go into a shoe shop in Saint-Hyacinthe, and in talking with the owner I found to my amazement that 80 per cent of his inventory was imported.

It means that the Canadian market—and the other stores are identical to that one—supplies only 20 per cent of the domestic consumption. That is an anomaly when one knows that workers, in the Canadian shoe industry are amply equipped and able to make a product that will meet the needs of Canadians.

Canadian footwear can favourably compare with any other. However, in certain government quarters, it is suggested that if we favour imports on so large a scale, it is because we want the protection of the Canadian consumer.

Mr. Speaker, in the light of my personal experience, even with the wave of shoe imports from foreign countries, far from paying less for my shoes in 1970, I have to pay more than when the Canadian market was supplied mostly by Canadian plants.

This argument does not hold and before making people believe that we want to protect them, it would be better to take the necessary steps to protect Canadian workers.

Mr. Speaker, I would have liked to discuss many other subjects, but since time goes by and that I have only a