

Customs Tariff

imports, but as Canadians we are concerned that we do not have the advantage of benefiting from Canadian production. We are almost totally dependent on American produce, a problem which we think should be overcome. If the hon. member is correct that it has been overcome, the legislation should specify how the trigger mechanism works. That is really what I am talking about.

The information that has been provided us during the debate is that the mechanism is triggered by the horticultural society. They have been partly successful in representing all the segments of horticulture, but there have been many complaints that they had not acted fast enough, though not nearly as many complaints as there have been that the tariff board which should be seized with the problem reaches a decision only after a certain period of time. The difficulty which the hon. member has indicated existed in the past will continue to exist under this mechanism, as I understand it.

My question is whether any consideration has been given to lengthening the period, say, for asparagus, from 12 weeks to, let us say, a maximum of 15 or 20 weeks between such and such dates. If we do not want to apply it for that long a period, we should still find a way of protecting our industry in the peak period. We will face difficulties because, no matter how it works, once the wholesaler starts buying tomatoes from California, for example, he would not think it was to his advantage to stop buying tomatoes from California for two or three weeks so he can buy them in Canada. So the wholesaler will get year round tomatoes from Mexico or California simply because it is easier than fitting in Canadian production. That is the only justification for applying the tariff, because I am sure the wholesaler does not care one way or the other. It is a little like the egg business. We had one person handling eggs in the Ottawa area, certainly by far the largest firm, by the name of Macartney, and this firm had never owned a hen. They bought all their eggs from the United States and delivered potatoes back to them. They did not intend to change the situation one way or another. I assume that is true with others as well.

● (1620)

Has the Tariff Board considered finding a better manner in which to trigger the mechanism, better than the one we have used in the past? If it has been changed from what it was in the last several years, perhaps we can give it a try. But if it has not been changed, has any consideration been given to letting the Department of Agriculture, for instance, trigger it rather than the tariff board, in order to work out the mechanisms? Normally it goes through both of them now, and perhaps another agency as well.

It has not worked out to our advantage because our fruit and vegetable industry is not in the incline, it is in the decline. The reason for passing these duties is to give protection to Canadian producers. If they are not increasing production, obviously the tariff structure should be changed. I am in favour of doing that to protect them. In a few years we will find that it is impossible to build an industry which has

[Mr. Peters.]

disappeared, but perhaps it would be possible now to keep alive an industry which we have at the present time.

I should like to refer to the example of strawberries. When one sees hundreds of acres of strawberries being plowed down simply because they are not profitable, then one should think of the reasons for that. One reason must be the ability of Americans to ship in strawberries during the season when Canadians are producing them. Perhaps I am wrong. We will find out next spring when there will be trouble with a number of industries.

Mr. Froese: Mr. Chairman, I should like to make a statement on strawberries. I take it that this could happen next spring, as the hon. member indicated, but I do not know. Personally I grow approximately ten acres of strawberries. We have had problems, but we hope that this measure will help to alleviate them. The problem with strawberries is not only the fact that they can be brought in at a competitive price. It is also the fact that a lever is being held over the heads of buyers in Canada so that continually they buy strawberries from Americans throughout the season. The threat is present that if they should cut off their purchases when strawberries are in season in Canada, they will not receive a supply afterwards. Some of the problems have nothing to do with price. There have been competitive prices, yet the problem exists because of that. We hope the surtax will help make the commodity a little more acceptable to Canadian buyers.

Mr. Peters: If one looks at the schedule, one will find that there is not much duty on strawberries anyway. Under schedule I it is 1-3/5 cents for general tariff and the most favoured nation, but not less than 10 per cent. The schedule reads in part as follows:

The free rate shall apply during the months of September, October, November, December, January, February and March.

During the remaining months in any 12-month period ending 31st March, the specific duty or ad valorem duty, as the case may be, shall not be maintained in force in excess of eight weeks, and the free rate shall apply whenever the specific duty or ad valorem duty is not in effect.

Dealing with strawberries for processing, the schedule reads: ... shall not be maintained in force in excess of six weeks, and the 10 per cent duty shall apply whenever the specific duty is not in effect.

Again the duty for processing is 1-3/5 cents or 10 per cent for both the most favoured nation or the general tariff.

When we are losing an industry, this 10 per cent seems to be a very small amount to apply. In the one case it only applies for eight weeks on fresh strawberries, and on strawberries for processing it applies for only six weeks. The hon. member representing that area is a producer. If he is satisfied with that small amount of protection and is convinced that it will keep him producing strawberries next year, I guess I am satisfied.

Clause agreed to.

Clauses 3 to 5 inclusive agreed to.

On clause 6—*Applicable rates*

Mr. Peters: Mr. Chairman, clause 6(2) deals with increasing rates by order of the governor in council. Would the