

Textile and Clothing Board Act

There are policy matters that also have to be considered. We agree with the minister in his attempt to formulate policy which will liberalize trade—and I use that word with a small “l”. At the same time, although we want to see trade liberalized there are domestic problems that must be taken into account. In this regard, we are particularly concerned with the employment aspect of the problems facing the clothing and textile industries.

Thus, there are conflicts in developing policy and there is a divergence of interests as well. We are concerned with the direction of government policy. The minister has indicated on many occasions that the government has to perform something of a balancing act. This is correct in the technical sense, but this balancing act comes after the basic policy framework has been established and developed. What we should like to hear from the minister at some time is something more in the nature of the basic direction of policy development rather than the details into which he goes on occasion with regard to the technical aspects of the situation. In saying that, I do not underrate the many important technical problems with which we have to deal.

I think a few words have to be said about the attitude of business and private interests in Canada. Hon. members have had it drawn to their attention in recent days that a number of representations taking violent exception to the bill now before the House have been made. The first point of objection registered by certain private interests is that it seemed the government was going to play a role in solving the problems of this industry. I suggest that this is an irresponsible attitude to take. Whatever might be said about some specific objections that may be raised, some of them valid, I suggest it is irresponsible for the private sector of the economy to take an attitude that, in effect, rules out a role for the government to play in solving our economic problems. This is a Neanderthal attitude which does no one any good in the long run.

This bill is but the first step in the development of a rationalization process for the textile industry of Canada, and it is a useful first step. It does not necessarily mean that we are going to approve what follows the bill; we shall have to judge that on the basis of government action. But an important point that needs to be stressed is that the success of the program will depend upon subsequent actions taken by the government, for which we shall hold the government responsible. The bill leaves final responsibility with the government, not with the board, and the minister underlined this point in his remarks.

The minister also outlined what seemed to be a comprehensive approach involving trade, the economy, regional problems, employment factors and assistance to workers and others when problems arise. This bill provides the framework within which a program of action can be developed, and we will be watching with interest to see what the government does in following up this program. We want a strong textile industry in this country because it has a very important role to play in terms of providing employment and needed goods for the people of this country as well as goods for export to other countries.

[Mr. Burton.]

As I have pointed out, we have to be concerned with our external trade relations, both with respect to attempts to liberalize our trade and with regard to certain trading practices that have created problems in the past. I noted that the minister stated he intended to undertake a rationalization of tariffs, and we will be watching to see what the government does in this regard, too.

One further point I should like to stress, a point that I feel is of great importance, was also raised in the debate on Friday by the hon. member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow). It is impossible for a program of rationalization in this or any other area to be successful when there is a high degree of unemployment in Canada or a high degree of slack in the economy. The best of programs cannot hope to be successful in solving the problems of this industry if it has to operate within this kind of framework. Thus, I presume that the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Pepin) will do everything he can within the councils of the government to ensure that the government adopts more quickly than it has indicated so far, policies that bring about a change in the direction of the Canadian economy.

We are very much interested also in the program to give assistance to workers who become dislocated, something that we feel is very important. I do not intend to labour this point since it has been dealt with adequately both by the hon. member for Winnipeg North and by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). We approve of the principle contained in this bill; we shall have further questions to ask in committee, and we hope that a positive and concrete program will follow from this legislation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must advise the chamber that if the minister speaks now he will close the debate.

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Industry, Trade, and Commerce): Mr. Speaker, I should like in the first place to thank the hon. members who took part in the debate. I regret only one speech and it is that of my friend from Compton (Mr. Latulippe). I would have liked him to use that opportunity more effectively to philosophize on matters other than poultices and strait-jackets. I wish he had dwelt on the importance of taking progressive steps to solve our problems.

Since we are only human beings, I consider politics as the art of fulfilling the “possible.” I do not think that all problems can be solved thanks to a single formula, whether it is purchasing power or anything else. Indeed, I think that problems are settled gradually. Moreover, quite often, the solution of a problem gives rise to two others which are sometimes just as difficult to solve. Such is life! I think that my idea of life and politics is much more realistic than the hon. member for Compton seems to imagine. History will be the judge as well as the people of Compton and Drummond.