

Government Organization

just as are the people in the constituency of Saskatoon-Biggan.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ricard: Mr. Chairman, I should like to make a few remarks on the measure now before the house.

First of all, I wish to congratulate my colleague for Drummond (Mr. Pepin) to whom the destiny of the new department will be entrusted. He is undertaking a tremendous task and my best wishes go with him. This task will require his services, his devotion every day. It also requires talent, a lot of work, some boldness, firmness and also, alertness. And I know the minister has those qualities, the qualifications which will enable him to succeed and from which the Canadian industry will benefit.

Mr. Chairman, this leads me to say that the department the minister will head in the years to come is most important to the working people in my riding. The two fields in which the workers in my riding can expect improvement, provided the minister will turn his attention to them, are the footwear and the textile industries. This is not the first time I make it a point to discuss those two particular topics. But those two industries are so important to our people that I owe it to my electors to protect their interest every time the opportunity presents itself.

Not very long ago, specifically last February 18, I received a letter from the Quebec leader of the United Textile Workers of America, Mr. Bert Demers. When reading the letter, it is easy to see that the textile workers of my province are quite worried. I take a few minutes to discuss the matter again this afternoon to urge the minister to even greater haste. Here is an excerpt from the letter addressed to me by Mr. Bert Demers, and I quote:

● (4:20 p.m.)

The closing down of factories in five so-called textile areas—due to a great extent to the abundance of textiles coming from countries where production costs are low—is certainly alarming to those who still have the good fortune of operating in this field.

In a brief accompanying the letter from Mr. Demers, one can read, for instance, that in 1954, imports under the heading "Textiles and ready-made clothing" amounted to 5 per cent of the consumption whereas in 1959, the imports had increased to 25 per cent, and in 1967 to 43 per cent. Needless to say, this hampers Canadian production and reduces employment.

In fact, this is what the brief says and I quote:

In other words, from 6 million lbs. in 1954, the level of imports so-called "cheap" in view of their origin, skyrocketed to 46 million lbs. in 1959, 74 million lbs. in 1964 and 118 million lbs. in 1967.

While this situation was developing here, elsewhere in Europe and in the United States, for instance, a rational policy was being implemented in order to restrict the ill-effects of such penetration of the world markets into their economies.

If our Canadian parliament allows imports from developing countries increase little or no restrictions—our manpower requirements in the textile industry will decrease year after year.

This is a warning which the minister will certainly want to take into account. He will want also to ponder upon another part of the brief which reads as follows, and I quote:

The problem is more than serious and it is time for concern. We cannot repeat it enough. Hundreds of workers in the textile industry, in Drummondville, Cowansville, Montmorency, Magog and several other regions, are being laid off. Some of them have been out of work for fifteen months. Some workers in Coaticook, Saint-Jean, St. Hyacinthe and Valleyfield are hit even more severely; what was their livelihood for many years, is disappearing.

The minister who has spent part of his life among working people and textile workers especially, knows fully well that when a worker has spent several years of his life in a textile mill, it is difficult for him to find work outside, in another factory. If these daring policies must be implemented, the workers, the present taxpayers deserve every attention.

I was talking during the last week-end with a worker who has been employed in a shirt factory in Saint-Hyacinthe for about 40 years. He is threatened to lose his job sooner or later if the present conditions persist. He provided me with data which he says are official and which give us an idea of imports from countries where the manufacturing cost is much inferior to ours. For example, during 1968 we have received from Taiwan 100,048 dozens of shirts, 58,720 from Malaysia, 18,000 from Singapore, 365,100 dozens from Japan, 57,000 dozens from Korea, and 217,000 from Hong Kong.

Mr. Chairman, those are the enormous quantities of shirts that enter the Canadian market. They create competition, which affects the Canadian workers.

I know that the minister must think a lot and work a lot. I know that the question of imports is giving him some trouble, but I know also that he means well. I am quite certain that he will do everything possible to