

Government Orders

It cannot be forgotten that the health of our textile industry depends to a certain extent upon the strength of its customers. The Canadian apparel industry, its major customer, uses about 35 per cent to 40 per cent of the Canadian textile industry's production.

Nor should we lose sight of the fact that the textile tariff reductions in Bill C-122 will directly benefit many textile producers by reducing their input costs. Bill C-122 represents a fair and reasonable approach to the issue of reducing Canada's textile tariffs.

Delays in introducing the long awaited reduction have created uncertainties for both the textile industry and its customers. It is time to remove any lingering doubts. I respectfully ask that hon. members support speedy passage of this bill through third reading.

Mr. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the plug given to me by my colleague from Brampton. I hope that the lights and cameras can handle the brightness.

Mr. McDermid: It looks like a test pattern.

Mr. Volpe: It is. It is a new product by Canadian manufacturers in the apparel industry and it is a plug for them. They are obviously interested in any kind of legislation and any representation that gives them a competitive edge in a very aggressive business.

• (1300)

The bill is supposed to address the competitiveness of the Canadian apparel industry and its ability to source material so it can provide a product that is attractive from a style point of view and competitive in price.

The committee went through the legislation. It is pro forma legislation. We are talking about reducing tariffs on a list of items. For those of us who want to examine each and every item on an individual basis, there are some five pages of coded documents and coded numbers in three columns per page. For the average citizen to see what exactly is exempt is a bit difficult.

However, we ought to keep a couple of things very much in mind. Some of the suggestions made by the minister opposite we would accept and expect for all Canadians in a competitive environment, in a world environment. The textile industry or the apparel industry in Canada has suffered enormous buffeting over the course of the last several years, in large measure because

of increased competitiveness from manufacturers and suppliers overseas, offshore and down south.

The problem has not necessarily been with the tariffs. I recall they were initially put in place to protect nascent and thriving Canadian industries and to give them the added competitive edge required to produce a quality product that would be attractive in its own right. Such attraction would provide Canadians not only with an industry but with an opportunity for employment as well.

Over the course of the last several years the problem the Canadian industry and Canadian manufacturers have experienced has in some measure been due to tariffs. However it has been caused in larger measure by the exchange rate. Today we are addressing legislation that says we are to reduce tariffs at the rate of 1.5 per cent per annum over the course of the next six years, to the point where we will reduce them to zero.

When the minister points to increased productivity on the part of our industry and the increased competitiveness of some of our manufacturers, we are talking about a rather recent situation given that the Canadian dollar has achieved a much more competitive rate overseas.

As a point of criticism, this legislation will encourage Canadian apparel manufacturers to source more and more of their products overseas. In committee we deliberated on this matter to a very thorough extent. The problem we will be facing in Canada is not so much whether we will be talking about whether our tariffs will cause greater strain on some of our producers, whether this is better from a competitive point of view for the consumer, but whether we are addressing an enormous need, a crying need in this country for an industrial strategy that promotes the development of a manufacturing sector.

As I indicated a moment or two ago, this sector has been buffeted and virtually destroyed. The legislation will not do anything to help our textile manufacturers. Granted, it may assist those in the apparel industry inasmuch as the materials they will be using will be available at moderately more attractive rates.

I wanted to give an indication that the Official Opposition is in favour of the reduction of tariffs. Having made extensive efforts to consult with the textile and the apparel industries on this matter, we would have very little objection. Our objection to legislation such as this is that it does not address the large picture.