

Textile Industry

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I wish to say that I despair for the government a little bit. I despair every time it attempts to intervene in the economy because inevitably that means more people out of work, more people trained for the wrong things, more people everywhere paying higher prices for everything, and no one any better off. The electronics industry is another example, but I will conclude my statement because I know hon. members opposite are getting nervous.

Some hon. Members: Carry on.

Mr. Comeau: I do wish that the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce had had something of real substance to bring us today. Instead all he has done is to plunge us and thousands of Canadians into gloom over the government's unusual ability to mismanage our economy. New legislation, not already entered on the order paper, will take another two years to come.

[*English*]

Mr. Max Saltsman (Waterloo): Mr. Speaker, we have heard today the introduction of Jean-Luc's law, which is that the length of the statement is in inverse proportion to its contents. I think the minister would have liked to say something today but he really has not said anything. All he has done is draw together bits and pieces of what have been government policies of one type or of another and put them together into what he would like to term a bold new program for the future. But on the contrary, rather than offering some hope for the industry through this statement, there are some serious questions that arise from it.

First of all, whatever protection did exist in terms of understood quotas or tariffs apparently is going to be dropped in return for arbitrary decisions on the part of the minister and the government.

Mr. Pepin: Oh, rot!

Mr. Saltsman: To begin with, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that I sincerely hope the minister's program will work. I do not want to start off by saying it is not going to work. I hope it will, and to some extent it can work if the minister is determined to maintain the textile industry as an important industry in Canada.

I point out to you, Mr. Speaker, that the textile industry has a very special significance to this country. It is one of the few industries that enable small towns to continue on an economic base and that enable some of the

[Mr. Comeau.]

depressed areas to exist. It is one of the few industries that require relatively small amounts of capital and that can be adjusted very rapidly to the needs of people. I suggest it is an important, interstitial industry for the development of this country, and it is vital that a policy be developed to ensure that the industry survives.

At page 10 of his statement, when the minister says that there is no advance commitment about special protection that can be provided, and when he talks about cases of serious injury, or threat of injury, what does he really mean? What are the criteria? When the minister talks about industries which have the prospect of being viable in the years ahead, which industries is he talking about, and which products? What sort of guidelines is he going to lay out for the textile industry so that it can do some planning for the future? There is no indication of this in the statement.

One might have forgiven the minister's lack of detail had the statement been drawn up over the weekend, or had the problem only come to his attention within the last few weeks, but this has been an on-going, serious problem in this country for many years. The minister has had six or seven years in which to prepare a policy, but there is nothing in his statement to offer us any encouragement to believe that there is some future for the textile industry under the kind of program that the government is introducing.

If we are going to negotiate a new energy policy one other thing which the statement points up, Mr. Speaker, is the need to negotiate an entire package of trade policies. The United States is quite willing to take our natural gas but not willing to take our textiles. I would suggest that serious consideration be given to not entering into negotiations on the export of raw materials, or the export of energy materials, until an entire package is worked out, until we see whether or not the United States market is going to continue to exclude our textiles.

As the minister has pointed out, the secondary textile industry of Canada is pretty efficient in the manufacturing of quality goods. I believe there are viable and very good opportunities for it provided the government is determined to ensure the survival of the textile industry. However, there has been no indication of this in the past. In effect, the government's past policy has been to have textile firms go broke and to do so quietly.

Those of us speaking today who are interested in this industry will be looking at gov-