

Customs Tariff

(Mr. Shields)—Regional economic development—Designation of areas in Alberta under federal development programs; the Hon. Member for Comox-Powell (Mr. Skelly)—Fisheries—Sale of canned tuna (a) Request for Minister's resignation. (b) Basis for Minister's ruling.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CUSTOMS TARIFF

MEASURE TO AMEND

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Epp (Provencher) (for the Minister of Finance) that Bill C-71, an Act to amend the Customs Tariff, be read the second time and referred to a legislative committee.

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex-Windsor): Mr. Speaker, I must begin by saying that this is not the most exciting and dramatic Bill that has come before the House of Commons in the last year, but it does afford us an opportunity to look somewhat critically at the trade policy approaches that this Government has been taking. That is what I would like to do now if I could, Mr. Speaker. I have some specific comments with respect to the Bill as well. I will turn to them in the latter part of my speech. However, I think it striking that the items of concern to the House of Commons with respect to trade which have been brought before us are, for the most part, housekeeping and technical matters which are dealt with in the Bill as opposed to the more dramatic and, hopefully, more effective and more important new directions in trade for which I think a great many people voted a year ago in this country.

● (1610)

Above all, it seems to me that the Government is characterized by a lack of strategy in the area of trade. I can think of three particular illustrations in this regard which face us as a country at the moment. First, if we look at the trade patterns of Canada we will see that our second largest trade partner by far is Japan. That is a demonstration of the tremendous importance of the Pacific Rim countries to the present economic health and to the future economic prosperity of the country. Korea has also emerged as a major trade partner. Indeed, even China has begun to develop as an important potential partner for Canada. Yet, we have not had any type of trade strategy set before us with respect to the Pacific. In fact, during the election campaign the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) talked about the importance, the great priority, which should be attached to Pacific Rim trade. Indeed, many Ministers have taken the Cook's tour of Southeast Asia and the Pacific. I am certain they have had interesting trips. We have seen grand pictures of the Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion (Mr. Stevens) taking part in social occasions in Japan. What we have not had has been any direct and forceful

articulation of a strategy to develop those markets more effectively in order that Canada can have the type of benefits from that trade which we need for our economic revival.

Second, beyond the particular parts of the world to which we could point as areas in which we would like trade strategy to lead us, it is clear when we talk of trade concerns that to effectively make our country more competitive, and to open up the potential for trade with other countries, that we need to have in place in our industrial structure the capacity to adjust, to be flexible and to take account of the problems which emerge to face our workers when imports from other countries begin to flow into Canada. It is in this area that we have seen the serious failure of strategy on the part of this Government.

The previous Government put in place a Labour Adjustment Benefits Program which was extended to certain communities which had been hard hit by downturns in the economy or by increased imports. That particular program was extended to cover automotive communities in Ontario between 1978 and 1984. However, the previous Government saw fit to cut off the extension of that program in February of 1984. The result of that move has been that workers who now lose their jobs in automobile parts producing plants in Ontario can no longer turn to the Government for labour adjustment assistance. The people who lose their jobs are often older workers who have long-term commitments to the industry in which they work. We all know from the experiences of workers over 50 years of age who come into our constituency offices just how difficult it is for them to suddenly find new jobs when faced with lay-offs. This is a crucial area in which labour adjustment benefits should be made available. Workers in my constituency who have faced this type of problem, even if they come from plants such as the Champion Spark Plug Co. factory in my constituency, which was eligible for this type of assistance in the past, have not been eligible for assistance from the Government.

I have spoken with the Minister of Labour (Mr. McKnight) with respect to this problem. I have put forward the case on behalf of workers in my constituency as forcefully as possible. However, all the Minister has been able to reply is that he hopes there will be a federal-provincial program to assist such older workers put in place some time within the next eight to nine months. I think that is excellent, if it happens; but there has been no commitment as yet to make certain that it will happen. If we are to have more open trade in the country and if we are to talk about freer trade with the United States, then the unanimous recommendation of the special joint committee which met last summer with respect to the need for better assistance programs has to be put into effect. In this area as well there has not been any leadership shown by this Government.

The same is true with respect to a point raised today by Conservative Members of Parliament. I am speaking of the question of renewal of the quota arrangements for our footwear industry. Our footwear industry has faced serious difficult import pressure for many years. Commitments were made by the Conservative Party, when not in power, that it would respond positively to the problems which the footwear