

Customs Tariff

we do? We immediately directed the tariff board to conduct an inquiry into the whole textile industry—woollens, cottons, silks, synthetics, everything in the tariff pertaining to textiles. We asked the tariff board to make its report phase by phase as the studies were completed. And we did that which the former government chose not to do: we asked the tariff board to make recommendations. How can a report of the tariff board following an inquiry be really serious, or really effective, if it is not accompanied by recommendations based upon the board's review?

The tariff board began its work with the woollen items in the customs tariffs which was the section they had studied three years earlier. They brought their study of conditions up to date, and made their recommendations and, in the resolution now under debate, the committee has before it the amendments proposed to item 554b which have been recommended by the tariff board.

I have stressed that this problem was not of our creation. This was one more of the problems to which we fell heir when our predecessors—our do-nothing predecessors—went out of office. Surely the textile industry and the tens of thousands of Canadian workers in that industry are entitled to receive some intelligent understanding of their problems and some sympathy in the light of their difficulties. But, Mr. Chairman, if the Leader of the Opposition did not commit himself on anything today, the effective spokesman for the opposition, the hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate, made the position of the official opposition abundantly clear. One does not need to search the speech of the Leader of the Opposition with a fine tooth comb to find out what he might have meant. All we need do now is turn to the very clear statement by the hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate, and it is abundantly clear from his remarks that the textile industry so far as the Liberal party is concerned will be permitted to die.

Mr. Pickersgill: Rubbish.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): The speech of the hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate was a pronouncement of a sentence of doom upon the textile industry of Canada.

I have something to say about this textile industry. The hon. member for Waterloo South was good enough to recall today that I have had some occasion as a native of South Waterloo, a native of the city of Galt, to know something about the textile industry and what it has meant in the Canadian economy.

[Mr. Fleming (Eglinton).]

Mr. Chairman, the textile industry has been a very important employer of Canadian workmen. The textile industry has shown in these recent years in the midst of its difficulties that it is prepared to meet the test of efficiency, for no finger has yet been successfully pointed in the course of any inquiry at the textile industry on the grounds of inefficiency. The textile industry has striven to keep ahead in a technological way of the developing needs of that industry.

I should like to tell the hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate that the textile industry has rendered notable service to Canada in times past in days of national stress.

Mr. Pickersgill: So have the farmers and fishermen.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): I do not ask the hon. member to take my word for it. I have here the recent report of the tariff board, and let me remind hon. members that every one of the members of the tariff board that prepared this report was a member appointed by the former government. Not one of the members of the board that wrote the report was appointed by the present government. Here is what we find at page 42 of that report:

In this connection, it should be stated that the record of this industry during world war II was outstanding; its contribution to the equipping, not only of the Canadian services but also those of various allies, was in every respect a splendid achievement.

Mr. Chairman, I need say no more about the notable contribution of this industry to the service of this country and its cause in days of stress.

But another important feature of the textile industry in the Canadian economy is that it has been largely a decentralized industry. It is true there are some very large textile mills in Canada, but it has been a feature of this industry that it has been largely decentralized. It has grown up as a localized industry and in that way it has contributed strength and stability to the economy of many a local area throughout this country. Let me quote again from page 43 of the report:

The industry is, by and large, a small town industry. Very often, even today, it is the industrial back-bone of semi-rural communities. It is currently giving employment to several thousand Canadians and affording the means of sustenance to their families. Partly because of its long association with scores of localities, it is part of the warp and woof of Canadian life. Often, in its own area, it provides the only openings for skilled or semi-skilled labour.

That is the industry which the hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate, speaking for the Liberal party, would condemn to doom and extinction. I say to the Leader of the Opposition that it is a poor way to serve the admitted needs of this industry to offer words.