

Customs Tariff

provides several important improvements in Canada's general preferential tariff which will directly benefit the least developing countries as well as the Canadian business community. There is a new duty-free entry provision for goods covered by the general preferential tariff that are imported from countries designated by the Governor in Council as being least developed countries.

In addition, the Bill liberalizes the rule governing the origin of the imported goods to permit tariff-free entry of goods partially produced in the least developed countries and finished in another country that would fall into that same category.

● (1700)

As I have indicated, the purpose of these measures is to give the least developed countries the potential for new export opportunities that were not available heretofore through the removal of the duties on goods that qualify for the preferential tariff when they are imported from these countries. Roughly one-third of the items covered under this general preferential treatment system are currently dutiable. The concession in the Bill will provide to the least developed country free entry under approximately 600 specific tariff items.

There is a safeguard provision which gives authority to the Government to implement tariff rate quotas which would provide Canadian industry with temporary relief from imports from these countries which might be perceived to cause or threaten injury to Canadian production. Therefore, while this legislation provides assistance, there is a safeguard feature built into it as well.

As I have indicated, the Schedules of the general preferential tariff rate changes in the Bill include a number of reductions that will assist developing countries. This provision was based on a procedure that permitted widespread public participation. A Member from the New Democratic Party asked how the Government arrived at its decision in specifying these particular items for special treatment in the Bill. In order to determine whether access to the Canadian market of products from the developing countries could be approved, the Minister of Finance directed the Tariff Board in July, 1980, to conduct a study and report on the impact on Canadian production of providing lower rates of duty for certain products eligible for the general preferential treatment.

After consultations had taken place, Part I of the Board's order was tabled in Parliament on May 20, 1981. The broadened coverage under the general preferential treatment as well as reduced rates of duty on a range of products of interest to the least developing countries. As a result, the Board's study will improve access to the Canadian market for approximately \$50 million worth of imports from these countries.

I might mention that this is an ongoing process of the Board. Part II of the Board's report was submitted to the Government in April, 1982. That report is presently being reviewed by the Government. The new tariff item in the Bill which authorizes the Government—

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. This is third reading of a measure that has had extensive discussion at the second reading stage. The Minister has now gone on for half an hour. This is an unprecedented thing for a Minister to do on third reading, in any event.

I can tell him now that the Official Opposition is prepared to have the question put on this legislation immediately, again in accordance with the specific request of the Government, through its House Leader (Mr. Pinard), that the legislation is urgent and to have it passed. We are prepared to deal with it now. That might save the Minister a good deal of time. If he rises again and continues in that fashion, it will be quite apparent that the legislation is not really urgent and that the Government does not want it as quickly as the Government House Leader led us to believe it did.

Mr. Cosgrove: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the support offered by the House Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Nielsen). I intend to conclude with two remaining points which I indicated I wanted to touch upon in my opening remarks. They will be brief.

In fairness, the House Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Nielsen) raised at the Committee stage a number of questions which I undertook to respond to. I want the opportunity to provide the Hon. Member with that response and it will be brief.

I think I should make the public aware that one other provision of the Bill deals with material that is imported for the assistance of disabled persons. I know that this provision enjoys the support of all Members in the House; at least, I believe so. This is a duty-free provision which provides for electronic selectoral control devices to assist people with speech impediments. This should be of immediate benefit to the handicapped people in our community who have a need for this equipment, as well as providing a cost break to them.

The last item I wish to touch upon concerns the provision covering materials used by dentists and dental laboratories which will result in the duty-free entry of a number of materials, such as dental cement, pins, posts and those other goods not manufactured in Canada and unlikely to be made here. Therefore, the Government agreed to provide duty-free entry of those goods.

The response of the Government to the request for this assistance by dentists and the dental industry parallels the action taken by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde) in his statement a few weeks ago when he announced that, because of the Government's concern for the provision of health and dental medical care to Canadians, it was not proceeding with the taxation of those health plans. This provision supports the Government's belief that at this time whatever help can be provided in these areas would be appreciated by Canadians generally.

In summary, the provisions in the Bill contain a number of significant improvements in the Canadian tariff. I have talked about the general preferential treatment measures which support developing countries and are appropriate at this time,