

Customs Tariff

ter in finance. Very well, we can accept him as such. And now, as I was saying, I am happy that we shall be able to sit together in the finance committee because quite frankly a detailed examination of customs tariffs is enough to put angels to sleep. Furthermore we would not even have a quorum in the House, because in years past we were lucky if three or four members were interested in the details of such bills and could even understand the schedules and appendices of such bills. I believe that we shall therefore be better off than in previous years.

I do not want to go into the statement made by the minister as we are nearing the time of adjournment for lunch, and I would simply say that I hope in a few minutes, after the House resumes after lunch I shall have the opportunity to speak about the progress that has been made following the GATT negotiations. We now know the facts and the reasons why we are repealing, in the case of Great Britain, Ireland and South Africa, the provisions concerning the British preferential tariff which have applied in Canada for the past 50 years.

The minister referred to a certain item, No. 605, if my memory serves me right, which concerns scientific equipment and materials for teaching institutions in Canada. This item is very controversial. We have had a whole report from the Tariff Board on this matter. This shows how willing the Department of Finance under the previous administration and this government has been to accept the recommendations of the board concerning the claims of the Canadian Association of University Teachers and the universities themselves, as this can considerably affect the budget of universities.

At this time universities are in a tight squeeze. First of all, they are being pressured by provincial governments anxious to restrict their budget; second, the federal government also wants to restrict its budget for post-secondary education, and finally, in view of the practically uncontrolled inflation tolerated in Canada, universities and learning institutions have seen their cost of operation nearly double in the last five years. How then can they balance their books and also provide acceptable teaching services? On the one hand, the Minister of State for Science and Technology (Mr. Roberts) has emphasized that the government, industry and learning institutions must upgrade their level of teaching and research, while on the other hand, the government is imposing customs tariffs, which means that an excise tax will follow.

● (1300)

What is the situation of these institutions? Mr. Speaker, I hope that after recess we can deal with this issue a little deeper and I intend to discuss the matter at that time, but I shall be brief and the only spokesman for the official opposition this afternoon as I dearly hope that this bill can be referred to the Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs before 3.30. May I call it one o'clock?

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): I thank the hon. member for Edmonton West. Pursuant to Standing Order 2(1) I do now leave the chair until two o'clock this afternoon.

At one o'clock the House took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. When the House rose at one o'clock the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) had the floor.

Mr. Lambert: Mr. Speaker, I should like now to turn to some consideration of the minister's remarks before the lunch hour recess when he was talking about the effect in Canada of the Tokyo Round under GATT. Some aspects of this matter will be discussed by the finance committee in relation to a different matter, namely, the discussion paper on the question of the imposition of anti-dumping, countervailing duties and emergency safeguard actions.

It was not clear from the minister's remarks, and it is not clear from the bill, whether clause 5 will give the government the power to act effectively when there is need for action. It starts out as though that were to be the case, because clause 5 of Bill C-50 amends or adds to section 8 of the present Customs Tariff Act. It says:

Where at any time it appears to the satisfaction of the governor in council on a report of the Minister of Finance, that any foreign country has imposed or increased duties on goods the growth, produce or manufacture of Canada, or has in any other manner restricted the importation of any such goods, with the result that tariff or other trade concessions previously extended to Canada are impaired, and has not made equivalent new concessions in respect of imports from Canada, the governor in council may, by order—

● (1410)

It goes on. This is precisely something we missed in the armoury of weapons or resources the government should have had to deal with certain countries. The government should have had that when we found ourselves suddenly confronting seemingly arbitrary or capricious actions by certain countries. I am afraid our friends to the south have been guilty of that on a few occasions, and it has come out with retaliatory measures as far as Canada was concerned.

Even the threat of those retaliatory actions has oftentimes given pause to the actions of one of our trading partners, and I know that in so far as Canada is concerned both government and industry, particularly government, have been very reluctant to act in certain fields in anticipation that the American treasury would take compensatory action in other fields. To that extent the Americans have had a considerable advantage over us. I have always felt that it was unfortunate that we did not have the same kind of legislative equipment available to our government. It is not that I want to invite tit for tat or a retaliatory battle because, gracious me, I think it would be the