

Customs Tariff

The third reading stage affords us an ideal opportunity to review the remarks of the Parliamentary Secretary who got sidetracked in a lengthy explanation on the merits of free trade, or rather on the disadvantages of protectionism. The Parliamentary Secretary had his say against protectionism but I would like to know whether he thinks that, in some cases, Canadians simply have to protect their industries.

I have two industries in mind, the footwear industry, for example, which at this very moment is trying to convince the Government to take a protectionist approach to save jobs in that sector. I regret having to say this, Mr. Speaker, but I have the impression that the Parliamentary Secretary had his speech drafted by officials of the Department of Finance who live in a world of their own. In today's real world thousands of jobs are on the line in the footwear industry. The Hon. Member for Saint-Jean (Mr. Bissonnette) knows full well that the textile industry employs thousands of workers in his own riding. That is why I find it hard to believe that the Parliamentary Secretary—presumably a Member who remains true to his origins—does not know the real situation in Quebec and in Canada, and I think he should not rise in the House to deliver speeches written for him by public servants who have lost touch with reality.

Mr. Speaker, I am convinced that the people from LaSalle, many of whom I know are employed in the textile and footwear industries, would not support the position of their elected representative who has stated that we should fight against protectionism at all cost. Even at the cost of many jobs in the Saint-Jean riding? I am sure that the Minister of State for Small Businesses (Mr. Bissonnette) would not accept that. I hope he will succeed in the representations which he is making and which I support, because that would also mean jobs for my own riding, as well as the whole textile, clothing and footwear industries in the Eastern Townships. It is all very well for the Parliamentary Secretary to introduce a bill and praise the virtues not only of free trade, but especially of the Prime Minister. We understand why he is praising the virtues of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, I suggest that, as an elected member of Parliament, the first and foremost duty of the Parliamentary Secretary is to protect his constituents, and he should place the interests of his constituents above the advancement of his own career. He should not take everything the Prime Minister says as Gospel truth. That is a mistake on the part of the Parliamentary Secretary. He should not let his desire for a ministerial appointment blind him, Mr. Speaker.

Over the past few weeks, we have had the opportunity to hear debates concerning matters of which the Parliamentary Secretary was perfectly aware. For instance, the Commercial Bank of Canada fiasco. Mr. Speaker, I just cannot understand how the Parliamentary Secretary can accept without flinching to share the responsibilities in this matter.

• (1730)

Mr. Speaker, I wonder to what extent, in the current debate . . . and I regret the Minister's decision to entrust his second-in-command with the responsibility to explain to us not only the details of this important legislation, but the whole philosophy behind it. That is an aspect of this Government which I find somewhat disquieting. A while ago, there were hardly any Ministers in the House; now, there are a few of them, but they do not appear to be too concerned about the consequences of the Parliamentary Secretary's statement. I can see the Minister of State for Small Businesses and, because he is a very realistic man, I know that he did not agree with the Parliamentary Secretary when he said that we have to fight against protectionism at all cost. Over the next few weeks and months, Mr. Speaker, we are going to—

I think the Minister would like to rise on a point of order. Please.

Mr. Bissonnette: Mr. Speaker, when the Hon. Member for Shefford (Mr. Lapierre) says and makes the assumption that I do not agree with the Bill, I would like to have some explanation as to why the Hon. Member for Shefford thinks I do not agree with this legislation.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): We are not in the period provided for questions and answers, and that is not a point of order. The Hon. Member for Shefford (Mr. Lapierre) has the floor; the Hon. Minister can reply later.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lapierre: To accommodate the Minister, who is not acquainted with our Standing Orders, I certainly will answer him, and I hope he will soon be on this side of the House so he can ask more questions and we will be able to answer them in greater detail.

Meanwhile, Mr. Speaker, let me explain what the real situation is. This Bill, and especially the speech made by the Parliamentary Secretary to introduce the Bill . . . The Parliamentary Secretary said we had to fight protectionism at any cost. Now, on the assumption that the Minister of State for Small Businesses (Mr. Bissonnette) is an intelligent man who protects the interests of his constituents, I also assumed that he could not go along with the statement that protectionism had to be controlled at any cost.

Mr. Speaker, I know the Hon. Member for Saint-Jean and Minister of State for Small Businesses is concerned about the well-being of his constituents, and if that were not the case I would be terribly disappointed. I am sure that in the months to come, his constituents will be able to test him and find out to what extent he is prepared to defend their interests. Then we will know whether the Minister of State for Small Businesses is Quebec's spokesman in Ottawa or whether he is now, as he