

*Textile and Clothing Board Act*

At any rate, I have said almost all that I had to say about Bill C-215, either at the time of my statement on May 14 last, or on January 21, on second reading, or during the numerous sittings of the Standing Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs. I had the opportunity there to deal with the subject in detail and to raise almost all aspects of this textile and clothing policy.

My officials and I have described the situation obtaining in that industry, which is not as good as some hon. members—the hon. member for Athabasca (Mr. Yewchuk) in particular—would have us believe so that we do not do anything about it, nor as bad as some others state so that we give it up. Both in the House and before the committee, we have mentioned the many changes taking place in that industry, namely the greater part that fashion will play in it, the reduced cost of labour as technology and equipment are developed, changes which, by the way, will be of advantage to our producers.

We have of course dealt with the problems resulting from imports from countries with low production costs and from the important sales that these countries are already achieving in Canada, as evidenced by the high degree of penetration of their products on the domestic market. We have seen, in committee, how the other industrialized countries deal with problems arising from exports, and I feel that we have clearly shown that Canada's attitude had been most conciliatory and constructive toward developing countries.

I have also described the new policy as global, with some commercial, industrial, financial, social, and even aesthetic aspects. I have indicated the general direction of this policy, that is rationalization and concentration in certain areas identified as viable, so as, indeed, to be able to avoid a protectionist attitude.

I explained the membership and the work of the Clothing and Textile Board, as well as the criteria on which it will base its judgments. Of course, I cannot go over all that. But I would have expected the hon. members and the editorial writers who condemned the policy, sometimes irrevocably, to have been better informed. But in this case, I think we were facing prejudices of which, as the author said, "reason knows nothing".

However, I must point out that few well informed members are against the bill. We mostly disagree about the principle underlying the implementation of the bill, some fearing that the Board and the government might be too protectionist, others that they might be too liberal.

Besides, may I say in passing, that some critics, from the opposition for instance, have managed to condemn the textile policy as too protectionist while in the same breath asking for more protectionism in the sector of industry or agriculture that means more to them or to their area.

If a logician were to study some of the speeches made in this House on the occasion of this bill, he would surely split his sides with laughing for several days. In either case, some members and editors argued on the basis of their own prejudices for, as I have said repeatedly, this bill does not reflect any prejudices: it merely enumerates what factors should be taken into consideration. At most,

[Mr. Pepin.]

this bill gives an orientation, that of rationalizing around the viable sectors. The sole purpose of this bill—and some members, of whom those from Regina East and from Waterloo, recognized it, and I thank them for it—is to create a framework, to provide an instrument for decision-making and means to implement decisions.

The whole thing is so well balanced, to my mind, and several others agree, that some industrialists are now using this policy to justify their closing down certain plants, while some members and commentators are accusing the government of taking protectionist measures.

In my opinion, both accusations are contradictory, it being impossible for both of them to be true. It seems to me indeed that some closings of plants now taking place can very well be explained by referring to the substance of this bill. If so, the bill cannot be protectionist. Life always offers some contradictions, and I agree, but sometimes there are contradictions which simply cannot be accepted.

[English]

There has been a lot of talk about free trade, Mr. Speaker.

Some hon. Members: Carried.

Mr. Pepin: May I ask for the indulgence of the House? I have been silent for days! These are my 10 minutes.

There has been a lot of talk about free trade in this debate. Everyone, inside and outside this House, is in favour of freer trade, especially when someone else is involved. If one reads the presentations made to the Canadian government by national institutions, from the Canadian Federation of Labour to the Canadian Labour Congress, he will realize that everyone in Canada is in favour of freer trade. However, if he reads the paragraphs that follow that statement, he will see that free trade is usually qualified by words such as "as much as possible". Free trade, protectionism and other concepts are usually found in their purest form in textbooks of sociology, economics or political science. I hardly need to say, though, that the art of the possible is the only reality. As the hon. member for Regina East (Mr. Burton) said, in practice it is a question of finding the right balance, the right mix. Intelligent men discuss the mix, the balance, not the absolute.

● (4:50 p.m.)

May I answer briefly some of the questions which have been raised? The hon. member for Ontario (Mr. Cafik) asked me whether it would be possible for the Board to review decisions with respect to the certification of special benefits for workers should new situations arise or new circumstances become known. Well, if new circumstances come to light, the board will surely be prepared to look at the situation again. If it were not, the minister could direct the board to do so.

I shall not deal at length with the treatises on planning given us this afternoon by the hon. member for Regina East and the hon. member for Waterloo (Mr. Saltsman); there will be occasions to do that in a more intimate way. It is true this bill does not provide a complete framework