

Supply

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): The Hon. Member for Richmond-Wolfe (Mr. Tardif), for questions and comments.

Mr. Tardif: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to congratulate the Hon. Member on his excellent speech and inform the House that if all Members showed the same courage in defending the interests of Canadian workers, wherever there are shoe factories in this country, we might get a better decision from the government than we have now.

My question is as follows: I assume you have had a chance to meet with your constituents who work in the footwear industry. In the light of the Minister's comments, in which he seemed to be saying that people working in the footwear industry were cheap labour working for very low wages, do you feel that the people working in this sector are satisfied with the kind of wages they are getting, and do they look to the future with confidence, as a result of the promised measures that are supposed to provide solutions to all their problems?

● (1250)

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his very apt question. First of all, regarding the working conditions in the shoe industry in my riding, and the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of those who work there, I have had three meetings with workers from my riding in the last three months, and I also tabled in the House a petition signed by 1,000 constituents, requesting that the quotas be maintained, and most of them were workers in the industry. So that is what the workers in my riding want.

As for wage conditions, there have been no strikes in this industry in my riding for quite a long time, Mr. Speaker, and although like people anywhere else, workers would like to earn more, they would have been quite happy to keep their jobs, a possibility if the Conservative Government had not taken this particular action. It is too bad that with all the information the Government is getting from Opposition Members who have factories in their ridings, it has not bothered to ask Government Members for information, because there are a number who also have general factories in their ridings. If the Government had done so, the story would have been quite different.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): Questions or comments. The Hon. Member for Ottawa West (Mr. Daubney).

[English]

Mr. Daubney: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member for Prescott very kindly offered to drive one of our Ministers to his riding to meet with some of the workers. May I ask the Hon. Member, whose concern for Canadian workers is so touchingly expressed, whether the car in which he would drive the Minister is Canadian made and whether the shoes on his feet are made in Canada? He should know the answer to that because those shoes are in his mouth so often.

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to answer the maiden question of the Hon. Member for Ottawa West (Mr. Daubney) who had such difficulty in being recognized because he has never asked a question before. I want to tell the Hon. Member that, yes, my car was made in Canada. It is an Acadian. It was made in Ste. Thérèse, Quebec. It is not one of those expensive American limousines which are driven by cabinet Ministers. And the name of my riding is Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, not Prescott. And my shoes are Canadian made.

Hon. Michel Côté (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Canada Post): Mr. Speaker, the Minister for International Trade (Mr. Kelleher) announced last Wednesday the new footwear policy adopted by the Government. This policy represents a major step forward in the implementation of the agenda for the economic renewal of Canada which was made public a year ago. I would like to address today some of the most important elements of the new footwear import policy which have a direct bearing on the mandate of my Ministry.

As a Minister responsible for consumer interests and competition policy, I have a keen interest in trade policy, since such policy can greatly influence the state of competition in Canada and the welfare of Canadian consumers. From this perspective, I am supportive of trade liberalization measures which contribute to increase the choice of products available to Canadians and foster a healthier state of competition in the Canadian economy. On the other hand, I am generally opposed to the imposition or extension of trade barriers such as global quotas which impose heavy costs on consumers and stifle competitive forces.

I have been particularly interested in the formulation of the Government policy on footwear because it is an important question for all Canadians and because it illustrates so well the difficult choices which Canadians will have to face in the years to come. What I would like to do today is to explain to the House why I believe the Government's decision on the footwear sector import policy is the right policy. In what follows I shall focus my attention on the effects of the prior global quota regime and contrast them with those which the new Government policy are expected to have on consumers, retailers and the footwear manufacturing industry.

The consideration of the relative costs and benefits of global quotas, particularly as analysed by the report of the Canadian Import Tribunal, has been a major factor in the formulation of the policy adopted by the Government. Before I turn to these questions, I would like to point out that the previous Government, which assigned the Canadian Import Tribunal to review the industry's position, was clearly aware of, and concerned with, the costs associated with the adverse effects of a global quota policy when it directed the tribunal to take, and I quote:

—into account the various elements that affect the retail price of footwear in Canada, examine what impact the import quotas on footwear have had on the operations and levels of activity of importers, wholesalers and retailers of these products in Canada and on the prices paid for footwear by Canadian consumers—