

*Textile and Clothing Board Act*

**Mr. Comeau:** The hon. member for Calgary South is not concerned about textiles. The Minister of Labour (Mr. Mackasey) said that even if the government has to close plants, that is progress. What an attitude! The minister stated in the budget debate not too long ago, and the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe (Mr. Ricard) referred to it, that great rationalization and progress must be made in the industry. He stated that even if there had to be lay-offs, that would be progress.

**Mr. Pepin:** I did not speak in the budget debate.

**Mr. Comeau:** They are very courageous. They talk about the best interests of the workers. This morning, the minister explained what Clause 21 was all about, and I am glad he did. Clause 21 deals with benefits accorded to the workers after they have lost their employment at the age of 54. The minister said that provision is made for the necessary funds for this type of program in the supplementary estimates of the Department of Labour for 1970-71. Therefore, the government expects immediate lay-offs in the textile industry.

I cannot understand the attitude of the government towards the textile industry. The minister knows quite well that lack of planning by the government will result in the textile workers being laid off at the age of 54 and which will necessitate them being compensated by receiving two thirds of their salary. I am not opposed to that. We have to provide them with some form of living allowance. It is the government that is responsible and has to make up for the effects of its policy. If the proper policies had been adopted in respect of the textile industry, the retirement of workers at the age of 54 would not have been necessary. What kind of an attitude is it to retire a man at the age of 54? The Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Pepin) says that this is progress, and the Minister of Labour agrees.

**Mr. McCleave:** Insensitive technocrats, both of them.

**Mr. Comeau:** The minister explained how the clause would be applied and he elaborated on the whole project. He outlined some of the conditions that a textile worker had to meet to benefit from this provision. Hon. members can read what the Minister of Labour had to say about it. The following is what the minister said in the last but one paragraph of his statement:

In my view, the pre-retirement plan, in particular, is a unique and significant social innovation, tailored to the specific problems in the textile and clothing industries. It will help greatly to meet the problems faced by displaced older workers in a manner consistent with the preservation of individual pride and dignity.

Is retiring a man at the age of 54 consistent with the preservation of his pride and dignity? The government is very proud of the fact that they can retire a man at the age of 54. This plan seems similar to one often referred to by the hon. member for Cape Breton-East Richmond (Mr. MacInnis), namely, the Devco plan, under which miners were taken off the production line and paid compensation. I have seen a cheque amounting to eight cents which represented the amount of compensation the

[Mr. Comeau.]

Crown Corporation paid to a miner for one week. I hope the same thing will not occur under this program. If it does, the minister will hear from us again.

Under this program, the government admits its failure to deal with our economic problems and particularly with the textile industry in Canada. These pre-retirement benefits amount to two thirds of previous earnings. I do not believe the workers want to retire early, and if there had been proper planning for the textile industry we would not be faced with this situation today. Where are we going? These ministers are proud of the fact that they are retiring people early. The Minister of Transport (Mr. Jamieson), in a speech he gave in Newfoundland not too long ago—and some hon. members from that province can correct me if I am wrong—asked “what is so great about people working?” The government has taken this attitude because they realize they cannot do a darn thing about unemployment. They are not interested in providing jobs.

The Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce spoke about efficiency and modernization. The minister is not a naïve man. He is bright and he smiles all the time. He is optimistic, but somehow he is not sufficiently persuasive to be able to convince the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and his colleagues to do something. This is where he fails. They do not have a plan. He might have one, but he cannot convince them to adopt it. They say they are doing great things for the workers, but they do not care about unemployment. The minister spoke about efficiency and modernization, although he knows very well that the textile industry in Canada is very modern and efficient. In fact, he stated so himself. I can quote his words as reported in the *Globe and Mail* of October 16, 1970 as follows:

Said Mr. Pepin: “Contrary to opinions sometimes expressed, these industries are as efficient technologically as those of any other country, including the low cost producers.”

Time and time again, the minister stressed that the Canadian textile industry is modern, efficient and rationalized. Yet, he is establishing a board to look into these matters. He referred to this aspect again last night. He pointed to an hon. member who was wearing a white shirt and indicated that all the others were wearing coloured shirts. He said these coloured shirts were a Canadian innovation. Canadian textile producers have been great innovators. It is my belief that other countries have copied what the Canadians have done and we are now importing these copied products into Canada. We should penalize these other countries for exporting these products which the Canadian industry has developed by limiting the importation of them. The government knows very well that the problem does not lie in lack of efficiency, but in allowing too great a quantity of imports.

● (3:00 p.m.)

The minister has given us statistics, but he knows very well that imports are now running at something like 65 per cent, which means that the Canadian textile industry is not supplying more than 35 per cent of the Canadian market. That is why we have this problem. I am not saying that we should ban all imports, but a reasonable