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Chair

Mr. Leon Benoit

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• (1005)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC)):

Good morning, everyone. We're starting the formal portion of our committee now, although most of us have just taken part in a two-hour meeting in conjunction with FIPA, very informative and very worthwhile.

We are here today to continue with discussion on Peter Julian's motion on the clothing and textile industry.

We have as witnesses from UNITE HERE Canada: Wynne Hartviksen, communications and political action director, national office; and Radika Quansoon, garment worker and member of the Ontario council.

Thank you very much for being here. If you could make your presentation, we'll get directly to questions after that. Go ahead, please.

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen (Communications and Political Action Director, National Office, UNITE HERE Canada): That would be great.

Hi, everybody. My name is Wynne Hartviksen and I am the communications and political action director for UNITE HERE Canada. Our union represents 50,000 workers across Canada and a wide range of industries. Our members work in hotels and restaurants and social service agencies and in autoparts plants. For the past century, we have represented Canadian garment workers. It's those workers in that industry we want to talk to you about today.

At the beginning of 2002, tariffs began to be lifted on many categories of apparel and textile products from China.

On January 1, 2005, all WTO-sanctioned quotas on apparel imports from China were also removed. Since that time, there has been a severe market disruption in the Canadian apparel industry, with imports from China rising in some product categories by a shocking 200%. Following the elimination of the decades-old apparel-quota system, many countries, most notably the United States and the European Union, moved to impose time-limited restrictions on the growth of specific apparel imports into their domestic markets, as allowed for under article 242 of China's WTO accession agreement. These restrictions, which are known as safeguards, allow countries to cap the growth of imports from China in specific apparel categories to 7.5% each year, from the past year until the end of the calendar year 2008.

This combination of events—the lifting of the quotas in 2005, and the fact that the U.S. and the EU both moved to implement safeguards—has left the Canadian domestic apparel market even more vulnerable to surging imports from China, the global leader in apparel production. As the EU and the U.S. safeguard measures reduced the flow of Chinese exports to the world's two largest markets, ours has been accessed more readily to fill the void.

The effects on jobs and the industry has been dramatic. As Bob Kirke, executive director of the Canadian Apparel Federation, said in *Business Edge* newsmagazine on November 24 of this year, the elimination of tariffs and quotas on imported clothing “was the perfect storm” for our industry.

While a number of apparel companies have been able to move from manufacturing to importing to survive, the people who work in this industry—the sewing machine operators, the cutters, and the finishers we represent—have not been so lucky. Since January 2002, more jobs have been lost—approximately 50,000—than remain today. As of January 2006, there were just over 48,000 jobs left in the apparel industry, according to Statistics Canada. The impact has been felt particularly in Quebec, which I understand you'll be speaking of more next week.

Though nothing has prohibited our country from using the same WTO-sanctioned safeguard measures that the EU and the U.S. used, the previous Canadian government chose not to act to negotiate safeguards. So in July 2005, our union, UNITE HERE, joined three garment workers, including Radika Quansoon, who is here with us today, and launched a complaint to the Canadian International Trade Tribunal, asking for an inquiry into the market disruption and the recommendation for the imposition of safeguards in eight specific categories. The CITT took almost 15 months to decide that Radika, though clearly meeting the dictionary definition of a producer, did not qualify to launch a complaint to the tribunal as a producer.

Unfortunately, during that time, the Canadian government did not act to negotiate safeguards, deferring to the CITT. In that time, more factories have closed, more jobs were lost, and more families and communities have been torn apart. We chose to submit our CITT complaint as workers in the industry, because we believe workers should have a say in the trade relations and regulations that so clearly impact their livelihood. Additionally, we were supported by a number of Canadian manufacturers and well-known producers.

It has been said only 1% of the industry wanted the Canadian government to implement safeguards. We disagree with that statement based on the pure numbers. We need to take a different look at this issue and ask ourselves how many workers and jobs are represented by the manufacturers who we know support the negotiation of safeguards.

The apparel industry is complex. Many of the thousands of establishments in this sector are very small. It's estimated that at least a quarter of them employ fewer than five people.

• (1010)

Many of the manufacturers in this industry are also importers, or they are producers in other countries, including China, who then import products back into Canada. Attempting to ascertain the support of this industry for one policy or another is difficult just because of the sheer size and the fragmentation of the operations.

But many companies are also understandably torn between their desire to protect their Canadian workers' jobs and operations and their need to compete in the Canadian marketplace, which is now free of any protection and in fact encourages importing from other countries over maintaining jobs at home.

We know, though, even with these factors, that many larger leading manufacturers supported our complaint to the CIIT, signing postcards, sending letters, and in some cases also sending letters to the former Prime Minister asking the Canadian government to negotiate safeguards.

I have with me today letters and postcards from about 30 apparel manufacturers who as of January of this year, we estimate, represent probably just under 10% of the apparel workforce in Canada.

More powerful, though, than just the numbers are the words of Canadian manufacturers. Along with the aforementioned letters to the former Prime Minister, I've also brought with me today—and I understand this is available for circulation—a letter from Kash Sood, who is the president and CEO of the Ranka Group.

I should make it clear, we don't actually represent the workers who produce for the Ranka Group. Kash Sood contacted us after hearing about our complaint to the CIIT, wanting to sign on and support the campaign.

In his letter of December 5 of this year to the members of this committee, Mr. Sood clearly states his support for safeguards. I quote:

Although a portion of our business is imports, we have prided ourselves on the fact that Ranka Enterprise Inc. is and continues to be a Canadian Manufacturer, which provides jobs to Canadians. We make a variety of apparel products, from women's clothing to hats and accessories and sell to well known retail stores, across North America, like the Bay, Zellers, Sears, Wal-Mart, Disney, Marshal Field and JC Penny.

Five years ago, our company employed in excess of 600 people; today the number is about 160 people. If the current surging imports from China continue, unchecked, the number of people we can employ will likely be further reduced.

Short notice of the Committee's intent makes it impossible for me to testify in person. But we want you and the other members of the Committee to know that, as a Canadian Apparel Manufacturer, we fully support the Canadian government implementing safeguard measures with China.

He finishes his letter with:

We urge the Government of Canada to take steps to address the competitive disadvantage Canadian clothing manufacturers face and we ask your committee to encourage the government to negotiate a safeguard agreement with China without delay.

Even those companies that have made the move to producing outside the country acknowledge the devastating effect of the regulatory changes on the Canadian market. From the same *Business Edge* news magazine of November of this year about the elimination of tariffs and quotas, I quote: It "had a disastrous effect on Canadian jobs and manufacturing," says Gary Steiman, president and chief operating officer of Winnipeg's Gemini Fashion of Canada Ltd., one of hundreds of Canadian companies that closed their manufacturing plants in Canada.

Currently, Gemini Fashion, which operates out of Winnipeg and used to employ 450 workers just a few years ago, now employs only 150 people and is operating as an import-only business.

With all these facts, we've been left to wonder why. Why is the new Canadian government not acting to stand up for Canadian jobs? Why has the government not moved to utilize the same WTO-sanctioned safeguard measures as the U.S., the EU, Brazil, Turkey, and—just in September of this year—South Africa have all used to protect their domestic industry and their local jobs? Why is one of the bedrock manufacturing industries in this country not allowed the same chances as its counterparts in most of the developed world?

We're not asking for a radical set of protection methods. While a discussion of things like labour and human rights in China is certainly valid and important, it's not the foundation of our argument. Currently, as Kash Sood said in his letter, Canadian manufacturers face a competitive disadvantage. Workers in this industry like Radika are the ones paying the price for this competitive disadvantage and simply want their government to utilize the same measures—safeguards—as many of our major trading partners have already used.

We would like to thank the committee for giving us this opportunity to speak to it today.

• (1015)

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation.

We'll go directly to questions, starting with the official opposition. Mr. Eyking.

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen: Oh, Radika is also going to speak. I'm sorry.

The Chair: Oh, did you have a presentation as well?

Ms. Radika Quansoon (Garment worker and member, Ontario Council, UNITE HERE Canada): Yes.

The Chair: Is it quite short?

Ms. Radika Quansoon: I hope so.

The Chair: We really need it to be as short as possible. It's going to be tough to get even one round of questioning in.

Ms. Radika Quansoon: My name is Radika Quansoon, and I live in Hamilton, Ontario. I've worked for Copley Apparel Group for about 22 years. We manufacture men's clothing. There are about 400 people who work for Copley, and we make high-end suits, some of which some of you guys may be wearing here. As the best-known brand in North America, we are the people who make the suits for Don Cherry.

● (1020)

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen: Don't hold it against them.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

An hon. member: Do you make those collars too?

Ms. Radika Quansoon: Everything.

About 90% of the Copley staff in Hamilton are women and immigrants. Over 75% of the women there can't even read or speak English.

We have jobs that allow us to support our families. We are skilled workers who take pride in our high-end, quality products. The problem is that our industry is under serious pressure. We wonder if our jobs will be there five years from now. For those of us who have done this type of work for most of our adult lives, retraining does not make any sense to us, because we are older people. Many of us cannot even speak English or French as a second language.

We work at good-quality, union-wage manufacturing jobs to support our families. What I'm trying to say is that we just need to save our jobs. Most of the time we work eight hours, six hours, four hours. We can't afford to live on half of our pay. We can't even afford to have a car. We can't pay for insurance or make payments on a car because we're not making enough money. Levi's closed down in Hamilton, and most of the people there came to our company, but we could only take so many. They were making \$15 an hour or \$14 an hour, but they had to start at \$8 an hour and up.

It's very difficult for us to even buy a house, because we don't know if we're going to work six months at eight hours or six hours, or whatever. Most of us use public transportation.

I don't understand how Americans can have safeguards. So can Europe and South Africa. Why can't Canada have them? We are trying to protect our jobs and have jobs for our families when they grow up. Why is it so difficult to do that? Most of us came to Canada to better our lives, but if we don't have work, we cannot do that. We're willing to work. We don't want to go on welfare or unemployment. If our company closes down five years from now, I don't know what most of us will do. So please, I hope someone listens and will do something to save our jobs.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Quansoon. We appreciate your presentation.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: We'll now go to the questioning.

Mr. Eyking, for seven minutes.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks for the great presentations that you came with today. I have a couple of questions for you people.

As you're well aware, it's not just China that's giving you the problems; it's everybody, from Costa Rica to Mexico to Indonesia. It's a major problem, and most developing countries in the world are having this problem right now.

Over the last few years—and I'm sure this is the case in Quebec, because Quebec seems to be hit the hardest—the Quebec government and the federal government, through, I think, the Department of Industry, were supposed to help your industry with new products and better technology. Are you aware of that? Did you see anything in your companies?

Another thing that was supposed to help out your industry dealt with the raw products that you use, whether it's cotton or whatever products. Before, there used to be tariffs on those products coming in. The government was also supposed to drop the tariffs on those products so that they would be cheaper products, which would help you with your industry. I'm wondering if you're well aware of any of that.

Thirdly, the European Union went through this a couple of years ago. The European Union put caps on products coming in, especially from China and India. Their industries welcomed those caps, but there was a major problem with transition. When these caps went into place, all these products were coming into Europe, but all of a sudden, nobody was allowed to distribute them. What happened was that consumers were quite upset because they were short on products. If we were going to put caps on some products, we would need some sort of a transition time, so that your industry doesn't all of a sudden look like it's making the consumer short on products.

So that's my third question. If there are caps in place, how much transition time would it take? For instance, if the Levi company is closed and we stop bringing jeans in from wherever, we can't adjust overnight. Is there some sort of plan for that?

Those are my three questions.

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen: Those are your three questions?

The Chair: Either or both of you can go ahead.

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen: Okay. I'll probably go back in reverse order and forget the first one by the end.

We also heard the stories about the experience with Europe. The method, though, of negotiating safeguards is a method between, obviously, the Government of Canada and, eventually, China. To start safeguard negotiations, the minister of trade, I understand, simply has to send a letter to China indicating they want to negotiate safeguards on some categories, and that would immediately start the ball rolling.

But as happened in Europe, the U.S. and South Africa, they're actually rolled out in a certain set of categories and negotiated. It's not necessarily all categories of apparel and textiles that are rolled out. It is a negotiated process, so I'd hope that we would have learned from the Europeans.

Our safeguard complaint, I should make it clear, was actually in eight very specific categories. It's hard to confess, but there are some categories of clothing that have now become so dominated by imports, in particular from China, that most of the jobs and the manufacturing operations have been lost already. So when we chose the eight categories we submitted to the CITT, we were actually very specifically interested in categories that had real employment in them, things like men's suits, which have been considered expensive products in the past. So men's and boys' suits were, of course, one of the categories, because quality has always been such an important issue in that category. It's the manufacturing that has survived all of the adjustments through many different free trade agreements. So we chose very specific categories that had high levels of employment and also, frankly, in some cases had historical significance in Canada.

You spoke about Montreal. As I said, I understand there are going to be some folks here next week talking to you about the Quebec experience. Montreal is still the third largest apparel manufacturing centre in North America after New York and L.A., and the men's suit industry, in particular, has always had a real place within Montreal's life and culture. So we chose very specific categories that we think would be able to maintained—and jeans, by the by, are not one of them.

We are aware of a number of the different programs. I would probably defer the question on the Quebec adjustment programs to Lina Aristeo from our Quebec council, who I understand is coming next week.

The raw products issue is quite difficult, the lifting of....Textile plants have in fact also gone through many of the same problems as we've seen in apparel. Again, our request for safeguards was just for eight specific categories of apparel goods. And we don't deny this is a complex industry. Manufacturing itself is under a lot of pressure in Canada from the competition from around the world.

But again, we really wanted to look at just this one measure, which actually can only be implemented until the end of 2008, allowing apparel manufacturing in these specific categories to adjust and make those adjustments to this new order, which is what Europe and the U.S. did.

• (1025)

Mr. John Maloney (Welland, Lib.): What were the eight categories?

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen: Good question, and it's the reason I have all of this paper sitting beside me today.

The eight categories we had requested were men's and boys' suits; men's and boys' jackets and blazers; men's and boys' overcoats; men's and boys' pants; women's and girls' brassieres; women's and girls' jackets and blazers; women's and girls' pants; and women's and girls' skirts.

Mr. John Maloney: If import restrictions were phased in, what would be the status of your industry after they are completely phased in?

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen: When we looked at questions like that, we looked to the experience in the U.S. After the imposition of safeguards—again, in the categories they applied their safeguard

negotiations to—they actually found job stabilization in those categories. There was still some job loss; it had just stalled out at what it had been. It had been quite dramatic, in the 10% to 20% range, and it stalled out down at around 5%. In some of the categories, they've actually seen some growth in manufacturing and jobs.

The U.S. is the market we look to for our example of that, and our union was involved in the States with the work on the safeguards down there, as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go now to the Bloc Québécois, to Monsieur Cardin.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): You're asking for safeguards in eight specific categories. How many categories are there in the apparel industry?

• (1030)

[English]

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen: I actually don't know the full set of categories.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cardin: I guess they are many of them.

[English]

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen: There are many. There are more than this.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cardin: So, there are some categories for which you're not asking for safeguards. Is it because you recognize they're hopeless or are they in good shape and relatively stable?

[English]

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen: I hate to say it's probably the former rather than the latter. There are categories where there is almost no serious level of domestic production anymore.

Women in this room will probably know that it's really hard to find some sportswear. Women's sportswear is increasingly impossible to find Canadian-made. There are certain manufacturers within certain categories that are still doing okay, some of them because they've moved to a combination of manufacturing and importing, and a couple of them just because they're very large producers, but all these categories have been feeling pressure for years now, particularly since 2005. The entire industry has felt pressure, and it's seen across the industry in terms of job loss and plant closings.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cardin: Are there in the apparel industry some niche producers who are the only ones making certain products, so they can still export substantially?

[English]

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen: Yes, and interestingly also, though, no.

I was speaking, actually, to some workers we represent. They work in a very small manufacturing plant and they make extremely specialized safety equipment, almost tailor-made to firefighters' search and rescue operations, not even just your average firefighter's uniform. They make extremely specialized uniforms and clothing for the safety industry, so we're talking about items that are made in very small numbers. You would think there would be no benefit, in contracts like that, to importing from China, yet they too are facing challenges and competition from China, even in those niche markets.

There are some who obviously, because of a specific design or a specific brand that they might make themselves and start up a small business, will continue to have a secure niche, but people are feeling pressure across the industry.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cardin: I am sorry to interrupt you but my colleague would also like to ask you a question.

Does the apparel industry intend to develop specific niche markets? If it does, would you need government support to get ready in case safeguards are implemented? You would need some time to adjust and the development of specific niche markets would have advantages in this regard. The government can also help you.

[English]

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen: Yes, that's sounds good, and a question that probably should go to the Canadian Apparel Federation. There has been a lot of work on trying to develop those niche markets. Some of them, you're right, we haven't been able to, because we can't get the breathing space. Safeguards would give the industry some of that breathing space to make that happen.

Again, I understand the Canadian Apparel Federation will come, along with the Apparel Human Resources Council, which is a human resource development group in which labour and industry sit together with government to try to discuss maintaining jobs in the industry. I think that's where we would love to see programs like that developed.

• (1035)

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Good morning and thank you for your excellent presentation.

Some countries have domestic policies that favour domestic procurement of apparel and textile products without necessarily going against WTO rules. Could the Canadian government similarly strengthen its domestic policies in order to encourage purchases of Canadian clothing and textiles while still abiding by the WTO rules against protectionism?

In other terms, can we have policies to supply the Canadian Forces and other federal institutions and to favour our own domestic products without being seen as going against WTO rules? I think we can do more to encourage domestic procurement.

[English]

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen: Yes. I should say, though, that safeguards are a WTO-sanctioned part of the China accession policy. It's hard to even really think of something sort of

protectionist, which is often seen as a leftist ideology, to be something that George Bush's government negotiated, but they did.

But on your issue of government procurement in particular, which we have taken a new and active interest in, I think you're completely right. The policy does need to be comprehensive. It needs to do things like encourage niche markets. It needs to do things like safeguards, which will give us some of that breathing space. But also, the Canadian government and in fact all levels of government need to consider that we might be sending somebody across the world to stand up for the interests of Canada in the Canadian army, yet they might be wearing goods made in China.

The Toronto Transit Commission actually has a very interesting procurement policy—some folks might have heard of it. It has a policy, negotiated by the transit workers' union, at least in terms of garments, that their uniforms are made in Canada, because that is a priority. They say, we are government-funded and we should therefore be also supporting the taxpayers who pay into that government funding, and we can do that by buying Canadian-made products.

So that has been a priority for some governments, and I understand Manitoba just instituted a fair trade procurement policy as well. So yes, we absolutely should do that.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André: So you think we should further consider these opportunities in order to provide you with some breathing space and find out how we can better encourage domestic procurement.

[English]

The Chair: *Merci, Monsieur André.* Time is up.

We're going to have barely enough time for each party to have one round. Ms. Guergis, for seven minutes, please.

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Thank you. I may be sharing my time with Mr. Menzies, depending on how quick I am.

Mr. Ted Menzies (Macleod, CPC): Depending on how long you talk.

Ms. Helena Guergis: Good morning. Thank you very much for being here.

I have a couple of questions. I need you to help me out here, because I'm getting some different information. So if you could clarify it all for me, great.

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen: I'll try. The numbers are complicated.

Ms. Helena Guergis: What I'm being told here is that in 2005, when UNITE HERE Canada petitioned the trade tribunal, the tribunal had asked you to establish and demonstrate that you had the support of the Canadian domestic industry before proceeding with an inquiry. The reports say they had asked for further data indicating domestic support, and you were only able to provide two letters from small domestic producers.

I'm hoping you can help clarify that for me if perhaps it was different, because having only two letters from small domestic producers really isn't helping your case. Why are you not able to give us further data indicating this domestic support that would allow us to proceed to the process that you'd like to see us proceed to?

I also want to point out that I am told it is less than 1% of the Canadian apparel industry that has made requests to the government. Have there been further requests that perhaps I'm not being advised of? If you can clarify that for me, I'd appreciate it.

What do you have to say about this, which has been pointed out to me as a fact? It says here that for Canada, it appears that the major result of quota elimination has been that the Chinese apparel imports have replaced imports from other developing countries that previously enjoyed a guaranteed market share under the previous quota regime. So if you'd care to comment on the reality of that for me, I'd appreciate it.

• (1040)

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen: Yes. That's because we had a policy of attempting to trade with less-developed nations, frankly as a way to assist developing nations. The garment and apparel industry has always been a real foundation for developing economies. There's an easy entry point; it is not highly costly capital investment to get into it. So we'd had a policy to do that.

When the sanctions were lifted, China became more prominent and has in fact moved into the space that used to be occupied by some of those other countries, and then overtaken it even more. Again, you have to vary from category to category.

On the complaint to the Canadian International Trade Tribunal, I'm not sure. I don't have the entire file with me here today. I understand there were more letters than that submitted. Some of it might have to do with the fact that the CITT required very specific manufacturing from each of them, but also that our complaint, though supported, was not brought about by manufacturers. We really did believe when we launched our complaint that workers should have a voice at the Canadian International Trade Tribunal and went forth with it on that. We did come up with some supporting documentation, but we felt that it should be recognized, honestly, that workers in the industry have just as much say, because they are producers—or at least have a say in things like the Canadian International Trade Tribunal.

I have with me here letters to former Prime Minister Martin from some of these large companies and postcards with which they signed on to our campaign, which I'd be happy to provide you with.

Ms. Helena Guergis: I'm sorry to interrupt, but why wouldn't they have been produced to the tribunal when the tribunal was asking for them?

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen: I'm not sure. I would be surprised that the tribunal did not receive that either, so I'd have to check back with our counsel on the matter as well. But I'd be happy to provide them to you.

Ms. Helena Guergis: Yes, we would need that information, because this is what we're clearly being told, that the data was not provided to proceed.

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen: I brought a pack, just in case.

There are a number of different types of manufacturers, a variety of employers. In fact, a uniform manufacturer that makes things like the TTC workers' clothes and the Air Canada pilots' clothes is one of them. There are a variety of employers, but all within these industries.

Ms. Helena Guergis: So would you not consider reapplying or going through that process?

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen: You know, yes. The decision came down at about 4:30 before Thanksgiving in October, and that was one of the things that were considered. The fact of the matter is, though, that even with a CITT recommendation of an inquiry, it would have to be the trade minister who would initiate the negotiations.

Interestingly enough, in Europe they had been looking to use their version of their international trade tribunal. There were complaints and inquiries going through it, but the European Union moved around that to act on its own to protect the industry.

So the problem was, honestly, that it took 15 months to say no, 15 months for us to put in a bunch of documentation, and we got back a one-page assessment the day before Thanksgiving saying, "with statements to follow later". And we did get some of the statements later, that "we don't recognize your standing to file a complaint".

Ms. Helena Guergis: I think there is obviously a miscommunication here, because I'm told, as I've said, that only two letters from small domestic producers were ever produced.

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen: I will absolutely look into that with our counsel.

The Chair: Mr. Menzies, you have one minute.

Mr. Ted Menzies: One minute?

• (1045)

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen: I'm sorry.

Mr. Ted Menzies: Anyway, thank you, ladies, for your presentation.

If we can change gears a little here, can you tell me what your union or unions have done to raise public awareness of this issue? Consumers shop with their pocketbooks. They always look for the cheapest garment. I happen to be married to one of those who does that—and many of us are. They're always looking for the cheapest garments, for good-quality garments, but the cheapest.

What have you done to raise public awareness that this form of protection may actually raise the cost of their garments?

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen: If we go to negotiate safeguards today, it's not going to roll back things. It would put in protection on the current import levels from China and allow it to go up by 7.5%. Fundamentally, that is the regime, so I'm not sure it would impact anything differently from what it is today, because it's—

Mr. Ted Menzies: Then why do we need to protect it?

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen: I'm sorry, let me go back.

If safeguards were negotiated today, it can't really reverse the damage that's already been done. What it can do is restrict the increases to 7.5% for the next two years of imports from China in these specific categories. So it wouldn't fundamentally change it.

We have done a lot of public things on this issue. We held a big rally in Montreal on October 20, where over 2,000 garment workers actually took to the streets of Montreal and fundamentally shut down for that one afternoon the third-largest apparel industry in North America.

To raise public attention, we've done a lot of work with the press. In the past, on this other angle, on the angle of where do people purchase things from and what does it mean to purchase things from different countries around the world, we've been well known for campaigning on anti-sweatshop legislation and measures like that.

We really do think, though, that this is just a very simple WTO-sanctioned method that other countries have used to give their industries—and frankly, their manufacturers, and by way of them, the jobs those manufacturers represent—some breathing room.

And yes, there are lots of people who look to get the best bargain. Frankly, Radika and I were talking on the plane on the way here, and lots of the workers in our industry find themselves in the same boat, perhaps, as your spouse. As Radika was saying, some months they'll work eight hours a day, and that's fine, they're making a full-time living wage, but when there is trouble, they get cut back first to six hours a day, next to four hours a day, and their wages go down, of course, proportionately with that, because they're hourly wage workers. Under that kind of pressure, some of our own members, of course, are shopping in dollar stores and purchasing clothes from some of these countries too.

Yes, we understand it's a complex issue.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Julian is probably not willing to give up some of his time for Mr. Menzies.

Go ahead, please, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): I always like listening to Mr. Menzies. I like rebutting him better, but I won't do that today.

Thank you very much for coming forward.

Ms. Quansoon, it's very rare we hear from working people at this committee; we tend to hear from corporate lawyers and corporate economists. So it's nice to hear a voice from what's really happening out there. I think it's a good wake-up call for Ottawa.

Ms. Radika Quansoon: I hope so.

Mr. Peter Julian: Certainly it is, and your testimony is much appreciated.

You talk about the uncertainty that you and your co-workers are living through right now. Are you saying that safeguards would help to provide some certainty in terms of your jobs because the plant would be able to plan more effectively over the next few years?

Ms. Radika Quansoon: Yes, that's what we're trying to do, because we lose a lot of work. Everything is going offshore, and

that's limited our work of eight hours. We have families to look after and half a paycheque doesn't cut it. So that's what we're trying to do.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

Conversely, if there's no action, you would expect that uncertainty to get worse.

Ms. Radika Quansoon: Yes, and we don't even know what will happen next year, because that's how we work. We might go six months or five months working eight hours, and all of a sudden it just drops. Then it might pick up again. That's why I said some of us can't even afford to purchase a car. We take public transportation because we can't afford to pay for insurance or a car payment. Most of the people live in apartments, and they're sometimes run-down apartments. Some have had to sell their houses, if they even had houses. A lot of single women, single parents, work there too. I'm one of them.

• (1050)

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you for that.

I had a number of questions for Ms. Hartviksen as well.

First, if no action were taken, do you have any projections on the number of jobs that would be lost in the next few months?

Secondly, I understand that the special measures would only apply until 2008. The question then would be, what would happen afterwards?

As my third question, the government has made some decisions very rapidly, although they're not decisions that have been very well thought out. If they made the right decision in this case and actually moved to implement the safeguards, how long would it take to negotiate and implement those?

Finally, I just want you to go back to the last election campaign, because the parties were all on the record. I believe the Conservative Party was on the record as saying they actually supported safeguard measures. I just want to confirm that, in a sense, seeing the Conservative members of this committee voting for the motion would just see them honouring one of their election pledges.

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen: I have returned to working for this union after about six or seven years. I have been back working for UNITE HERE for three and a half months. In that time, we've had two plant closures. One has basically just been announced, and we're probably looking at 400 or 500 workers. That's just in the time that I have been here.

In terms of whether or not they'll have a next contract so that they will be able to start literally the month afterwards, some of these manufacturing operations run so close that it's sometimes even hard to predict which ones are going to go down. But if we're looking at an average of 500 workers every three months, start counting backwards.

The fact of the matter is that it's actually more than that. Those are the manufacturers that we represent. Again, the apparel council estimates that about 25% of this industry is unionized. Lots of the other small owner-operator microshops, as they call them, have less than five workers we don't hear about, but they do account for a large number of workers as well.

Mr. Peter Julian: So we're talking about five to ten workers a day losing their jobs.

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen: If you did the math on that, sure. My math skills aren't always that great.

Mr. Peter Julian: I did the calculation.

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen: What happens afterwards, in 2008? Again, because this is a negotiated process, it's possible that we could negotiate agreements with China after that. It's a consideration. There are different provisions—I'm not extraordinarily well versed on them—in the U.S. and EU agreements to potentially keep some categories going after the 2008 end of the marker of the WTO-sanctioned safeguard measures.

Yes, in the past—we did our political research—there was a motion encouraging the former government, under Mr. Paul Martin, to investigate the use of a number of measures to assist the apparel industry, including the work safeguards. It was supported by the Bloc Québécois, the NDP, and the Conservative opposition party at that time, as well as, I should say, a number of Liberals who actually broke with the government at that time to support it as well.

In fact, Mr. Menzies over there has been good. Mr. Menzies was the critic in the last government. In fact, we might have occasionally been quoting some of his press releases in some of our press releases to try to raise public awareness on this issue. He was saying that the Canadian government should stand up for Canadian jobs, and we fully agree with him on that matter.

An hon. member: Hear, hear!

The Chair: One minute, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: I fully support what Mr. Menzies has said. He was very eloquent. I have nothing to add. In this particular issue, Mr. Menzies was bang on. I'm pleased to be working with him to put safeguards in place.

But let me get back to how quickly it could be implemented. How long will it take if the government makes the right decision next

week, following what will hopefully be the unanimous adoption of this motion?

• (1055)

Ms. Wynne Hartviksen: If the trade minister wanted to send a letter today, that would immediately start the process. It's from that point forth that the numbers would be calculated—from today, if he sends a letter. That would be when the lift of the imports and what they can increase by would start.

Frankly, if we just look to the U.S., they began talking about this even before the lifting in 2005. They were able, within a few months, to have a number of categories negotiated and in place, and then they actually went for a more comprehensive one.

The EU, though, actually moved way quicker than that. They first commissioned their version of the CITT in April 2005, and by June 2005 they had an agreement with China.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The time is up, Mr. Julian. It looks like we have another committee coming in.

I'd like to thank you both very much for coming. I appreciate it very much.

We will continue this discussion on Mr. Julian's motion next Tuesday. We have three witnesses next Tuesday and only one hour scheduled, once again from 10 to 11 o'clock, after the FIPA meeting. Then we also have to vote on Mr. Julian's motion. Would there be agreement to extend that to 11:30?

Ms. Helena Guergis: I have another committee at 11 o'clock.

The Chair: The vote is a little tricky.

You understand that an hour is very little time. Let's work on that between now and Tuesday to see if we can arrange something. I don't know what it will be.

We'll work on that, and until then, this meeting is adjourned.

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