

## Tabasco Spices Senate Hearing On Tariff Pleas

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The ball bearings squeaked, the zinc seemed leaden, but it was the Tabasco sauce that provided the spice yesterday at Dr. Ribicoff's Friendly Neighborhood Tariff Repair Shop.

Which is to say it was miscellaneous tariff bill day, when every imaginable kind of special pleader shows up to ask the Senate for relief.

The forum was the Finance Committee's international trade subcommittee, chaired by Sen. Abraham A. Ribicoff (D-Conn.), who keeps these pleadings moving like a Detroit assembly line.

Each pleader gets five minutes. A green light in front of the chairman starts it. A yellow light warns that a minute is left. A red light and a bell announce that time is up.

Now, for that Tabasco sauce.

Edmund McIlhenny Jr., whose family has made the familiar hot stuff in Louisiana since 1868, didn't even need his full five minutes to convince Ribicoff that here, indeed, was a tariff problem of no little consequence.

A nation that mainlines Bloody Marys and gets through beach weekends and school fund-raisers on oceans of chili con carne will understand.

To keep the nation in sauce, the McIlhenny Co. wants Congress to do away with a tax provision that costs the firm about \$20,000 a year on imported Mexican peppers.

Due to the tax code, the same peppers from Colombia and other Latin nations are sent to Avery Island, La., with no duty.

### BILLS, From A1

"I've been using Tabasco sauce for years and I didn't know what it was about," Ribicoff said. "I think it is something worth saving. How much do you produce in a year?"

"About 30 million bottles a year," said McIlhenny.

"Seems to me it lasts for years. One drop in a cocktail," the senator responded.

McIlhenny said he could provide a recipe that would hasten the use of the senator's supply of hot sauce. Laughter erupted in the hearing room.

If the subcommittee gave the man with the piquant story a warm reception, other pleaders didn't get quite the same in this annual exercise in corporate poor-mouthing.

One trade group after another marched before the panel to urge the suspension or continuation of different tariffs. It all came down to money.

Witnesses invoked threats to national security, potential unemployment, unfair competition. One, H.T. Sullivan, of Eastern Telephone Supply and Manufacturing, Inc., Newport, R.I., told of abuses by Customs officers.

Others made their pleas and left. Lead and zinc producers wanted a suspension of duties; the bearing makers wanted the law clarified.

For most, Ribicoff and fellow senators listened and said little. But when the man from the American Iron and

Steel Institute spoke, Sen. Bob Packwood (R-Ore.) pounced.

Thomas Evans, representing the institute, asked the subcommittee to approve a House bill that temporarily would suspend duties on imported fluorspar—a vital ingredient in steel production.

He argued that domestic fluorspar production is going down, demand is going up and the steel companies face the prospect of being held up in the marketplace.

"What's your position on imported steel?" Packwood asked.

"We favor free trade when it's fair trade," Evans said.

The senator noted that the industry opposed steel imports, but favored imports of fluorspar which competes with the American-mined commodity.

"Sounds to me like a whose-ox-ignored argument," Packwood said.

Washington attorney Bart Elsher, speaking for Frontier Spar Corp., a U.S. producer, urged retention of the duty on fluorspar, which he described as a waning industry that needs all the help it can get.

Elsher said that Mexican and South Africa—major producers—are depressing prices and grabbing for a larger share of the U.S. market.

Then he hit one toward the bleachers: U.S. Steel, he reported, owns a major South African fluorspar mine, and wants the duty suspended so it will be more profitable.

If he had more to say, it was too late. The bell and the red light cut him off.