

# Point of View

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## Parting Thoughts

By *André Comtois*



As you read this, the Drummondville plant better known in the last few years as Swift Denim is about to close its doors. Unless another textile company purchases it, an 86-year legacy will end.

My primary reason for writing this editorial is to extend my thanks to all employees – union and management alike – who have worked to find new markets, reduce production costs and achieve excellence. Throughout the years and, particularly, in the last three, your efforts on these fronts provided a light at the end of the tunnel. Unfortunately, forces beyond our control worked against us. What we could do locally was not enough against rising exchange rates and transportation costs. It was not enough to counter the bilateral trade agreements put in place by the United States that our own government ignored. Even the partial closure of our operations in 2004 and our repeated cries for government action to address the factors that contributed to it were not sufficient.

Contrary to what some say outright or behind closed doors, the textile industry has faced tremendous challenges in the past and can continue to flourish in Canada. However, the industry needs a market – an avenue for its products. I believe we were on the right road, but the lack of political will to support Canada's manufacturing sector has had dire consequences. The textile industry fared well under NAFTA because it had a secure footing, but as this slipped away, little was done by governments to provide stability.

I made my career in a once-prosperous industry, and I still believe that we did all we could to adapt to new circumstances and prepare ourselves for the future. My work with the Textiles Human Resources Council and the Comité sectoriel de main-d'oeuvre de l'industrie textile du Québec made clear that the industry is very much alive and full of resources. My greatest regret is the knowledge that Canada's highly-qualified textile workforce – which we fought to develop and is well-recognized for its excellence – is being eroded by plant closures like ours. I truly hope that organizations like the Textiles Human Resources Council and the Comité sectoriel will be able to preserve these skills to help those that survive the crunch of globalization.

Although I don't have a crystal ball, I do not doubt that many of today's textile companies will adapt, reinvent themselves and continue to prosper. Only the future will tell which ones and with which resources. I continue to believe that there is a place for a strong Canadian and Quebec textile industry. Those that survive may be fewer in number but, I believe, they will be more determined than ever.

My final thought: Our industry has a number of organizations working to bring decision-makers together to collaborate and share strengths for the benefit of the entire sector. Though each of our companies is facing its own challenges, we must look beyond our differences and work together to overcome today's trade and market challenges.

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