At that time our industry opposed this law because we foresaw that it would inevitably allow the importation of pumice to spread to a much wider area on the East Coast and to take on a much larger scale. Unfortunately, we were proved right about that.

The only east coast area whose imports of masonry pumice have not risen since the duty was eliminated is Florida. The subsequent poor performance of the low-quality pumice then being imported there temporarily eliminated the local market for pumice. As we had feared, it temporarily damaged the local market for other lightweight aggregates as well.

The rising swell of imports

Elsewhere the story was quite different, and it bore out our fears that elimination of the tariff would invite destructive competition all over the East Coast. Imports, which were negligible outside of Florida in 1959, had by 1961 reached 24,000 tons. In 1962 they tripled to 76,000 tons. In 1963 they doubled again to 146,000 tons. Since then they have proceeded in an erratic but unmistakable climb that last year brought them to 238,000 tons, ten times the level of 1961. If unrestrained, these imports will undobtedly go higher.

The worst of it is that the full brunt of this asault on U.S. markets falls on a few firms located at or near the East Coast. Almost all the pumice imports are coming into the eastern seaboard ports between Boston and Norfolk and are being marketed near those ports. Though local markets for lightweight aggregate are growing as builders discover the advantages of these materials, they remain limited, and as a result of this intense import competition individual plants and even companies are in danger of being swamped and driven out of business.

When low-priced pumice became available in the Norfolk area a year or so ago, for example, it put domestic competitors at a sudden and severe competitive disadvantage. Lured by lower prices, local concrete block makers turned to pumice, and local construction firms turned to the correspondingly cheaper pumice block. Whereas in 1966 no pumice at all had been sold in the Norfolk area, last year pumice took up 21 percent of the lightweight aggregate market there, and in the first six months of this year pumice has preempted a full 55 percent of that market. Perhaps coincidentally, a local block maker who had been using another type of lightweight aggregate went into liquidation and has left the business.

Similar, if less drastic, consequences have followed the import surge in other areas. On up the east coast last year pumice imports chewed up an estimated 15 percent of the lightweight aggregate market in the Baltimore area; 60 percent of the market in Philadelphia; 47 percent of the market in Elizabeth, New Jersey; 83 percent of the market in Milford, Connecticut; 71 percent in New Haven, Connecticut; 69 percent in Providence, Rhode Island; and 41 percent in Boston. Evidence so far this year is that these percentages will rise further. Naturally, the domestic firms in these areas are being hurt by the loss of business. Workers in these areas are being hurt by the loss of jobs.

Meanwhile the pumice importers have promised to extend their marketing efforts back down the remainder of the East Coast, around to the Gulf Coast, and through the St. Lawrence Seaway to Great Lakes ports as well. When and if they are able to carry out their promise, many more domestic producers and their employees will be similarly threatened.

Causes and adverse effects of pumice imports

The price advantage imported pumice enjoys over competing domestic aggregate stems from its distinct advantages in labor and materials costs. The wages paid to Italian or Greek laborers are far below those we pay our workers here in the United States. Moreover, the pumice is considerably less complicated to mine and process than the expanded or sintered materials we market. It requires nothing like the millions of dollars of plant and equipment in which our firms must invest.

Even the costs of transporting the pumice across a thousand miles and more of ocean adds no more to the dockside price than a rail journey of a few hundred miles adds to the price of domestic aggregates. Ships whose holds would otherwise be empty or filled with ballast on return trips to the U.S. give rock-bottom rates to shipments of materials like pumice that can be transported in bulk.

We consider this invasion of our markets by cheap materials processed by cheap labor and brought to the United States at cut rates a form of unfair com-