WASHINGTON, Feb. 24--Senator Strom Thurmond called on the Congress today to resume its constitutional control over imports and tariffs in order to save the domestic textile industry and its more than a million jobs from the grave peril posed by skyrocketing low-wage imports.

The South Carolina Democrat made his plea in a Senate speech touched off by a full-page newspaper advertisement by J. P. Stevens & Co. depicting the gravity of the import problem on textiles. He read the advertisement into the Congressional Record and then cited an impressive array of figures from government sources which show that textile imports--particularly in cotton cloth, apparel, and yarn--jumped substantially in the last quarter of 1959.

In citing the ratio of textile imports to exports, the Senator warned that the United States is on the verge of switching from a net exporter to a net importer of cotton cloth. His figures showed that the ratio of imports to exports has increased from 2% in 1949 to 93% during the last quarter of 1959. He pointed out that yet unreleased government figures may show the United States as of this date to have already reached the position of being a net importer of cotton cloth.

The Senator indicated he felt there was little hope of obtaining relief for the industry from the Administration in view of the State Department's perversion of the trade program into an instrument of foreign policy, which he said was never intended by the program's founder, Cordell Hull. He pointed out that there is virtually no hope in an escape clause action in view of the Administration's attitude. Additionally, he voiced doubt that the pending Tariff Commission investigation under Section 22 of the Agricultural Adjustment Act would prove of any real value because it is confined solely to the cotton export subsidy. The White House informed Thurmond just prior to delivery of his speech that the President had refused to broaden the scope of the Commission investigation to cover the whole broad field of cotton product imports.

After giving the Senate his views on possible administrative relief procedures, the Senator urged the Congress to take action by legislating a reasonable system of mandatory quotas. He stated that the voluntary quota program with Japan had helped some but that now approximately one dozen countries have begun flooding United States textile markets since the Japanese voluntary system was negotiated.

"Voluntary quota agreements," he said, "are unsound, both as a matter of principle and practicality, even in the case of such nations as Japan where the government regulates industries closely."

Thurmond placed particular stress on the damaging effect increased imports could have on domestic employment, not only in the textile industry but in other threatened industries as well. He pointed out that the number of United States workers will swell by 13.5 million by 1970. Most of the increased work force, he said, will be constituted by unskilled and semi-skilled workers, elderly persons, and women--the type most susceptible to unemployment and the type labor generally required in the textile industry.
The administration of the reciprocal trade program came in for bitter denunciation by the South Carolinian. He said:

"The so-called reciprocal trade program, as originally conceived and enacted into law, was certainly not designed to visit these drastic consequences on American industries and American workers. Despite the unwise delegation by Congress of its constitutional power, authority, and responsibility to regulate tariffs and imports to the executive branch, basic safeguards for the protection of domestic industries and American workers were provided in the law. Unfortunately, as our trade program has come ever increasingly to be administered as an instrument of foreign policy, rather than as an economic program, those safeguards provided in the basic law delegating the Congressional power to the Executive have been usurped or ignored. In their place, half-hearted efforts have been made to remedy the situation by extra-legal methods conceived in the minds of those concerned with foreign policy, rather than in the minds of economists."